Song of Joy and Regrets

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Song of Joy and Regrets

by HelloKitten

Summary

The Archery competition at Qishan this year has hit a snag. As the Sects face the wrongs perpetrated by their future selves, Wei Wuxian finds himself adopted by half of the cultivation world who are determined to save him from himself.

Baby Wangxian suffers. Adult Wangxian's job here is done.

"I'm starting to see a pattern to all his plans..."
"Do they all involve him being bait?"
"Yes" came deadpanned responses.
Hua Cheng is not amused.

Notes

When something gets stuck on repeat in your head, you write it down and hope for the best.

Updates will be unreliable but first few chapters are being proofread ^_^

Story is a mix of donghua, manhua, drama series, and a tiny bit of Founder of Diabolism Q where I see fit.

It's just a forehead ribbon... right?

Chapter Notes

Updated 7/21 for grammar and correcting titles

"Wangji-xiong!"

"What?"

"Your forehead ribbon is crooked."

"Ridiculous"

"It's true this time! It really is crooked. If you don't believe me, Let me straighten it for you."

Lan Wangji felt a tug on his forehead ribbon as it loosened from his head. Fingers tightened on the bow in his hand as he slowly turned to face Wei Wuxian. The moment both locked eyes on each other, a bright light encased the archery field and those nearby.

Consciousness slowly returned to Lan Wangji and he became aware of his surroundings. Around him, the others are slowly coming to and regaining their footing. They found themselves in a large hall decorated with ornate wood carvings along the walls and paintings in a style that could not be recognized by any of the cultivators. Several seats were spread out in front of a white cloth that hung on a rod that was suspended from the ceiling.

Lan Wangji joined his brother and uncle where they stood at the center of the room. "Xiongzhang."

Lan Xichen, "Wangji. Are you well? Any injuries?"

"Mn." replied Lan Wangji. His eyes are still scanning the room for any possible threats.

After ensuring there were no injuries, Nie Mingjue and Nie Huaisang joined the Lans. Followed by the Jins.

Jin Zixuan stood to his mother's side as she scanned the room. Confused as to why she was here as well since she was at Jinlin Tai while her husband and son attended the discussion conference, she wondered if her friend and future daughter in law will be there as well. Their engagement might be broken at the moment but she refuses to give up the idea of her A-Xuan marrying A-Li.

Across from the Lans, Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Yanli were confused as they were last at Lotus Pier only to wake up here. Jiang Cheng helped his sister to her feet while Jiang Fengmian

helped Yu Ziyuan to hers.

Nie Mingjue, "Any idea where we are?"

Lan Xichen, "I'm not sure. We were on the archery field when Wei-gongzi -"

Sparks began to emit from Yu Ziyuan's ring as the words left Lan Xichen's mouth. "What has that brat done now? All he ever does is bring shame to his sect!" she shouted.

Jiang Fengmian, "San Niang..."

Lan Wangji's hands were fisted at his side as he glared at the ground. Wei Wuxian had pulled his forehead ribbon. He must know what the ribbon means. What it stood for. He had copied the rules so many times how could not know what it meant!

Jiang Yanli, "Where is A-Xian?"

The question brought Lan Wangji up short from his internal tirade. How did they not notice the lack of the troublemaker's voice? Looking up from his vigil of the ground, he sees Jiang Wanyin is equally taken aback. It was quiet... too quiet.

"He's here."

From the front of the room, Wen Ning held an unconscious Wei Wuxian up in a sitting position on the floor while Wen Qing checked his vitals. Seeing this, they all moved towards the trio with concern. Lan Wangji's heart gave an uncomfortable tug as he saw Wei Wuxian's pale complexion.

Jiang Cheng, "What's wrong with him? Why isn't he waking up?"

Wen Qing, "It seems whatever brought us here affected him more severely than the rest. His core is stable though his spiritual energy is low. It's as though an array had drawn too much spiritual energy from his core faster than it could replenish it at the time of activation."

"Will he be ok? It hasn't caused any lasting damage has it?" Jiang Yanli asked worriedly. A-Xian looked awfully pale.

Wen Qing, "He just needs a transfusion of spiritual energy to help kick start his core."

Jiang Cheng moved to take his shixiong from Wen Ning while giving him some of his spiritual energy. He didn't like how pale or how still his shixiong was. Wei Wuxian was not meant to be so still.

Lan Xichen, "It looks like an array is the cause of this then? There were no arrays on the archery field and Wei-gongzi would not have had the time to draw or even activate an array before we were brought here."

Turning to the Sect Leaders, Lan Xichen asked if they had seen anything from where they sat. Each in turn gave a negative reply.

Nie Mingjue snarled out, "Aside from the blatant display of disrespect in the seating arrangement and the Wen brat, nothing stands out."

"There was an array on one of the pillars on the way in." came a weak reply. They all turned to see Wei Wuxian regaining consciousness. "I saw it while I got lost looking for the archery field. It was a containment array so I figured it may have been to keep the targets manageable. I didn't have time to really look at it as the competition was starting."

Now back on his feet, Wei Wuxian looked less pale. He was still unsteady on his feet so Jiang Wanyin helped to steady him. Lan Wangji focused his gaze on Wei Wuxian's face, noting that color was returning to it and let out the breath he didn't know he was holding. The forehead ribbon incident is now completely forgotten.

Wei Wuxian gave a small smile towards Lan Wangji when he caught his eye to reassure the Lan that he was fine. ' *Ah, Lan Zhan. I've figured you out. Your eyes...they give you away.'*

A sudden flash of light brought everyone's attention back to the front of the room. Bickering can be heard as the light faded.

"He specifically told you not to touch the array!"

"I didn't! It activated on it's own!"

"Guys..."

"An array can't just activate itself, Young Mistress Jin!"

"Well it did! And stop calling me that!"

"Why are you even here?"

"Because I was invited!"

The sects looked at each other in confusion. In front of them were disciples in various Senior robes of differing sect colors but none were familiar to their sects. With them, though facing away from the room, were five adults also in robes of several Great Sects displaying their high rank. One wore the robes of the Qinghe Nie Sect Leader, one in the robes of the Yunmeng Jiang Sect Leader, one dressed in the Lan teacher robes, one in Lan robes reserved only for the spouses of the main family, and one in the robes of the Chief Cultivator.

"BOYS!-" the Lan spouse began to shout; causing Lan Qiren's eyebrow to twitch slightly.

Jiang Fengmian clears his throat, "Excuse us, it seems we may be in the same situation. Perhaps we can figure this out together?"

At his words, the young newcomers turn startled gazes behind their elders, disagreements forgotten. The adults turn back and freeze as their eyes land on the others in the room.

Are you sure he's a Lan?

Chapter Notes

Edited 7/21 for grammar and correcting titles.

To avoid confusion, Future travelers will be referred to with their courtesy names or titles while the younger will be referred to with their birth names.

"Oh Shit"

Lan Sizhui, "Jingyi!"

Lan Jingyi, "Sorry! Sizhui, look! I'd forgotten how Lan-xiansheng looked with a beard!"

Jin Ling went pale as he looked at a younger version of his uncle, "Jiujiu is going to kill me."

Lan Sizhui smirked. Wei-qianbei was the reason Lan-xiansheng had grudgingly stopped growing a beard. What was the point of trying to grow one when it "mysteriously" got shaved off the next morning?

Lan Qiren closed his eyes and stroked his beard to regain his composure. The image of him beardless struck a nerve as he remembered the antics of a certain female menace. He's certain that he knows who is to blame for his future state.

Hushed silence takes over the room. Unmoving up front, the travelers took in the faces of those who have been gone for three decades. Parents, siblings, and friends gone long before their time.

"Well that explains the travel aspect of the array. Time travel." whispered Ouyang Zizhen; grunting as JIn Ling's elbow jammed into his ribs.

"It's a fierce corpse!"

"Quick, kill it before it attacks!"

As swords were drawn from their sheaths, the younger cultivators pushed said fierce corpse behind them as they formed a shield around him.

A Lan senior disciple stepped forward with a bow, "We apologize for the unexpected fright. Wen-laoshi is our mentor and healer. A sentient fierce corpse, yes, but he is in full control of his actions. He poses no threat to anyone so long as those he cares for are not threatened. We can assure you that no harm will come to anyone."

'He's like a mini Lan Zhan! ' Wei Wuxian thought to himself.

The Lans study the man's mannerisms. He carried himself like a model Lan. Well-mannered and calm. His words are precise and to the point like Lan Wangji. There was a hint of steel in those words. A warning that he will not hesitate to defend if attacked.

When he rose from his bow, the man flashed a reassuring smile similar to the ones that often graced Lan Xichen's lips. Yet, there was a hint of familiar mischievousness in his eyes that reminded Lan Zhan of the boy who was driving him to distraction.

His forehead ribbon marked him as a member of the main family and the hairpiece his status as heir. If they were truly time travelers, was he Lan Wangji's son or Lan Xichen's?

"A-Ning? Why are you... what happened to you?!?!" Wen Qing gasps as her eyes snapped worriedly between her brother beside her and the fierce corpse. Wen Qionglin could only bow his head as he took in his sister's presence. It was so good to see her again, alive and healthy. Wen Ning pulled their sister into his arms to keep her from storming up front.

Jiang Yanli, "A-Cheng?"

Jiang Wanyin takes a stuttering breath in as his eyes land on his parents and sister. Drinking in the sight of them alive before him.

"A-Die. A-Niang. A-Jie", he manages out. Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan stared with wide eyes as they took in their son's appearance. Older and more confident. He had an aura of authority that one only gained from hardships and loss. As he stumbled their way and pulled his sister into a tight hug, the years of grief crashed over him and overflowed. "A-Jie..."

Wei Ying and Jiang Cheng looked on in awe at the older Jiang Cheng. The growing sense of dread at his older self's reaction to his parents' and sister's presence caused Jiang Cheng to shift closer to Jiang Yanli.

Feeling like he was intruding, Wei Ying turned his attention to the remaining cultivators standing in front. Eyes landing on the older Lan Wangji.

'Lan Zhan sure ages well. He's gotten more handsome .' Blushing slightly, he focused his attention on the stranger in the Lan robes. The man looked like he was debating being sick in front of everyone or downright passing out.

"DA-GE!"

Nie Mingjue barely had a second to brace himself before his arms were full of a crying Nie Huaisang. Dressed in the robes of the Nie Sect Leader, his brother looked older and more mature. Stronger if the stranglehold he had around Nie Mingjue's waist was any indication.

Nie Huaisang, "Da-ge... You're here. You're here. You're really here... I've missed you so much!"

From his words, Nie Mingjue and Nie Huaisang realized what that meant. Nie Mingjue held his brother tighter and dragged the younger into the embrace as he had also started crying.

Belatedly, Nie Mingjue noticed Huaisang still was not carrying a saber. He fought the ingrained habit of yelling at his brother for neglecting his saber... again. His brothers needed his comfort right now.

Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren could not take their eyes off the Lan Wangji in front of them. The man was dressed in the Chief Cultivator's robes and carried an aura of authority and no nonsense that a strong cultivator carries. Lan Xichen noted that his younger brother also looked... content and sure of himself as he walked forward to greet them.

Lan Wangji, "Shufu. Xiongzhang." there he hesitates before addressing his younger self, "Lan Wangji."

Lan Xichen, "Wangji." ' *You seem happier.'*

Amusement flashes in Lan Wangji's eyes as he meets Lan Xichen's eyes, "Mn." ' *I am.'*

Lan Qiren, "Wangji, will you introduce the senior disciple with the clan forehead ribbon?"

Lan Wangji, "Yes, Shufu."

At his vantage point in the front of the room, Wei Wuxian looked on as his shidi hugged Shijie. No, he no longer had the right to call her Shijie. He caused her son so much pain already. He felt Jin Ling shift to his side and turned his head to look at his nephew. Jin Ling's eyes were flickering between Jiang Yanli and Jin Zixuan taking in as much of them as possible. Wei Wuxian laid a hand on his shoulder and gave a gentle squeeze.

Jin Zixuan noticed the Jin disciple standing next to the unknown Lan. Why did the Lan hold a resemblance to his father but slightly like Wei Wuxian as well? The Jin looked almost identical to Jin Zixuan himself though he carried himself with an air of insecurity.

Jiang Yanli, "A-Cheng, was A-Xian not with you?"

The travelers turned their attention to the unknown Lan. Jiang Wanyin pulled away from his sister to return to his shixiong's side as Lan Wangji and Nie Huaisang did the same. All eyes on the room tracked their movement with confusion as no one was answering Jiang-guniang's question.

Lan Wangji grabbed Wei Wuxian's hand in a firm grip. *'I'm here.'* Wei Wuxian rewarded him with a fond smile. *'I know'*

The time travelers gave collective bows to the room as Wen Qionglin stepped forward to greet them to the dismay of several.

Wen Qionglin, "This one is Wen Ning, Wen Qionglin. Titled The Ghost General. Formerly of Qishan Wen. Now Master Healer and Teacher of the Healing Arts of Gusu Lan."

The silence that followed his greeting was deafening. Before them was a fierce corpse that held his consciousness and free will. A fierce corpse who was also skilled at the Healing Arts.

Wen Qing and Wen Ning wondered what had happened to Wen Qionglin. Why was he now part of Gusu Lan? How did he become a fierce corpse and a sentient one at that? Was that how he received the title of The Ghost General? He looked no older than Wen Ning was now so it had to have happened not too long from now.

Nie Huaisang stepped forward. "This one is Nie Huaisang. Sect Leader of Qinghe Nie. Connoisseur of all things Art and Information." That earned him eye rolls from Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian and a Lan equivalent of one from Lan Wangji. Nie Mingjue let out a huff of amusement at the offended sound the older Nie Huaisang made at their reaction.

Jiang Wanyin, "This one is Jiang Cheng. Jiang Wanyin. Titled Sandu Shengshou. Sect Leader of Yunmeng Jiang."

"Sandu Shengshou?" Asked Jiang Fengmian while Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Cheng looked pleased at the title given. Jiang Yanli and Wei Ying had proud smiles on their faces.

Jiang Wanyin, "It was the title I was given during the...* clears throat* the war." Murmurs and gasps of "War?" ran through the sects.

Lan Wangji glanced at his husband before stepping forward and presenting his bow. "This one is Lan Zhan. Lan Wangji. Titled Hanguang-Jun and Chief Cultivator. I am the current Acting Sect Leader of Gusu Lan."

Lan Xichen took a deep breath. For his brother to be the Acting Sect Leader, it meant that something happened to both him and Uncle. Wangji did not seem to be grieving when he greeted them so perhaps not. He would most likely be in seclusion if that wasn't the case. Lan Qiren closed his eyes to contemplate what he just heard. Did history repeat itself?

All eyes turned to the Lan standing in front as he stepped forward and bowed.

Wei Wuxian, " This one is Wei Ying, Wei Wuxian- "

When you fancy someone...

Chapter Summary

The one where WY and LZ have an epiphany...

So does a certain Peacock

Liu Rushi: Madam Jin

Chapter Notes

Edited 11/27 for grammar and correcting titles.

I have spoiled you with many updates today. This may or may not be the last update today. Until next time!

The room waited for the man to continue his introduction; Jiangs and Lans alike didn't know how to respond. This man was definitely not Wei Wuxian. How dare he claim to be someone who is standing right there!

"Wow... and *I'm* the dramatic one?" Ouyang Zizhen deadpanned. His friends nodded in agreement. Jiang Wanyin pinched the bridge of his nose and Nie Huaisang looked away hiding his smile with his fan.

First to recover Jiang Cheng shouted, "Wei Wuxian? Bull shit! Who the hell are you? There's no way you're Wei Wuxian! You don't even look like him!" Pointing to Wei Ying at his side.

"THAT'S WEI-QIANBEI?!?!?!" Shouted three of the senior disciples.

Lan Jingy, "He looks nothing like how our books portray him!"

Jin Ling nodded his head in agreement as he pondered, "I wonder what else the books were wrong about?"

Ouyang Zizhen sighed dreamily, "He's so handsome!"

A complicated look crossed Wei Wuxian's face before he laughed and exclaimed, "Ah Chengcheng... look what a cute little angry grape you were!"

"WHO ARE YOU CALLING CHENGCHENG!?!?" shouted Jiang Cheng and Jiang Wanyin causing Wei Wuxian to laugh harder. Jiang Yanli giggled into her sleeve. Her brothers' antics will never change it seems.

Jiang Wanyin, "In all seriousness, that *pointing to Wei Wuxian* idiot is Wei Wuxian. It's... a long story. Finish your introduction already so we can find a way out of here."

Wei Wuxian, "Aiya, A-Cheng's so mean to his Shixiong. Ok ok! I'm finishing. This one is Wei Ying. Wei Wuxian. Titled The Yiling Laozu. Former Head Disciple of Yunmeng Jiang. Now Arrays and Talismans Grandmaster of Gusu Lan."

Lan Zhan's gaze remained on the man who supposedly was Wei Ying. He can see the tells in the way the man... Wei Ying... carried himself. Lan Zhan chanced a look over to Wei Ying. Wei Ying looked to be lost in thought with a complicated look on his face. What had happened in the future for him to be in a different body?

Jiang Cheng faced Wei Wuxian first then decided to confront Wei Ying instead, "You married into Gusu Lan?"

Wei Ying, "Why are you yelling at me? I haven't done anything!"

To Jiang Wanyin, Jiang Cheng demanded, "You let him marry into Gusu Lan? He hated it there!"

Jiang Wanyin scoffed in response, "Like we can stop them."

Lan Qiren, "Who?"

Confused, Wei Wuxian asked, "Pardon?"

Lan Qiren, "Who did you marry? You're wearing Lan Spousal robes so I ask you... who did you marry?"

Lan Xichen glanced at his brother as Lan Zhan stiffened next to him. Lan Xichen gave his brother an encouraging smile when he looked up from the floor. '*Wei-gongzi is too attached to Wangji. Marrying me is out of the question.'*

The mischievous smile that spread on his face as Wei Wuxian turned to his husband gave the Jiangs a cause for alarm. They knew that smile meant trouble was brewing. Zidian sparked as Yu Ziyuan held her tongue. She can't risk insulting this older Wei Wuxian if he's now part of Gusu Lan.

Catching on to his intentions, the Senior boys tried to school their features as they waited for the shoe to drop. Lan-xiansheng's temperament back then was well known by all of them. Especially if it involved Wei-qianbei. There were several rules forbidding contact with Wei-qianbei as proof of that fact.

Lan Wangji turned to the disciples and instructed, "Introduce yourselves. Sizhui, you begin."

The Lan disciple stepped forward to introduce himself. The Lans were curious as to who this disciple was. He wore a forehead ribbon that only the main family wore. When he had spoken earlier, the disciple was well mannered and seemed to embody all the values of Gusu Lan.

Lan Sizhui, "This one is Lan Yuan. Lan Sizhui. Sect Heir and First Disciple of Gusu Lan. Youngest Talisman and Guqin Master."

He dares a glance at his parents and continues at Wei-qianbei's excited nod. "Son of Lan Wangji, Hanguang-Jun, of Gusu Lan and… Wei Wuxian, The Yiling Laozu, of Yunmeng Jiang."

"WHAT?!?!?!?"

Thud

Lan Xichen, "SHUFU!"

Wei Wuxian openly gaped at the man... boy... his son? Their son? *Their* son?

'Mine and Lan Zhan's son. Lan Spousal robes. Married into Gusu Lan. Lan Zhan... married. Oh my God...'

'Son? Wei Ying and I... a son?' ran through Lan Zhan's mind . *'He's wearing Gusu Lan Spousal robes. We're... we're married?'*

Something released inside their hearts like a dam finally breaking as their eyes met.

'Oh'

'Oh'

Lan Jingyi, "I think you broke them, Sizhui." Eyeing Wei Ying and Lan Zhan with rapt attention.

Lan Sizhui, "Mn." Internally laughing at his future parents' dilemma.

Jiang Cheng, "WEI WUXIAN! WHO LET YOU RAISE A KID?"

Wei Wuxian flinched, "Technically, Lan Zhan raised him. I was..." He let the thought drop as Lan Wangji took a subtle breath in.

Lan Xichen helped Shufu to his feet as he regained his senses. Looking up to see his brother caught up in his thoughts, Lan Xichen shared a small laugh as he caught Jiang Yanli's laughing eyes. Making a note to tease his brother about it later.

Distractedly everyone turned their attention back to the front as the disciple dressed in red Senior robes of Baling Ouyang stepped forward with a bow. "This one is Ouyang Zizhen. Sect Heir to Baling Ouyang. Youngest Head Healer and First Disciple of Master Healer Wen Qionglin."

Ouyang-zongzhu openly gaped at this man who was to be his unborn son. His wife was only a few months pregnant at the moment and had her heart set on Zizhen as the courtesy name if the baby was to be a boy. He turned to Yao-zongzhu and the cultivators around him excitedly as they congratulated him, "That's my son... I'm going to have a son!"

The Lan that was in a shouting match earlier with the Jin disciple stepped forward next with a bow, "This one is Lan Jingyi. Second Disciple of Gusu Lan. Head of Discipline and Youngest Arrays Master."

Lan Qiren, "Lan Jingyi. You are my cousin, Lan HuiFan's son I take it." His tone sounded like everything made sense how this unruly man could be a Lan.

Lan Jingyi smiles sheepishly as he straightens from his bow, "Yes, Lan-xiansheng." At Lan Qiren's resigned sigh and Lan Xichen's amused smile, Lan Jingyi steps to the side.

Snapping out of his internal panic session, Wei Ying elbows his shidi to whisper with a laugh, "I like him! He's so unLan-like that he reminds me of me!" Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes and turned his attention back to the front.

The Jin disciple steps forward to introduce himself as he glances at Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian, receiving a nod of encouragement from each man.

Jin Ling, "This one is Jin Ling. Jin Rulan. Sect Leader of Lanling Jin. Sect Heir to Yunmeng Jiang. Youngest Archery Master." He takes in a deep breath to calm his nerves. "Son of Jin Zixuan of Lanling Jin and Jiang Yanli of Yunmeng Jiang."

Jin Guangshan appraised his grandson from where he stood. The man was handsome and carried himself with the pride of a Jin. The fact that he was dead did not sit well with Jin Guangshan. *'Perhaps he could tell me how I died so I can prevent it from happening.'*

Liu Rushi and Yu Ziyuan became ecstatic at the news that they had a grandson. The years spent on trying to bring their children together paid off in the most spectacular way. Jiang Fengmian nodded in approval with a gentle smile on his face. Very proud of the man his future grandson will become.

Having had his suspicions confirmed, Jin Zixuan took a deeper look at his future son. The man shared his features but his eyes held a gentleness. Though his pattern of speech reminded Jin Zixuan of Jiang Wanyin, there were tells of Jin in his body language.

Jin Zixuan is not an idiot. He sees his sword, Suihua, in the cultivator's hand. He knew what that meant. And from the way the man's eyes were flickering between him and Jiang-guniang with a look of longing and heartbreak, it meant she was gone as well. Something tugged at his heart at that knowledge.

It seems their engagement was reinstated after all. Was their marriage happy? He had vowed years ago that he will never be like his father. If he and Jiang Yanli got married and had a child together, their marriage had to be one stemming from love. He wouldn't allow himself to settle for anything less.

Jin Zixuan couldn't help but look towards Jiang Yanli when he heard her gasp. Her eyes filled with tears but she looked... amazed and proud? Amazed that this was their son. Proud of his accomplishments. Jin Zixuan caught her eye as she turned to look in his direction.

'Ah' . His heart stuttered at the hopeful look directed at him. Caught up in the wonder, he returned her smile wholeheartedly with a nod to their son to convey his pride in their son as well. The smile he received in return was brighter than anything he had seen. *'Oh. Oh, that's what Wei Wuxian meant. No one is good enough for her. But I can try to be.'*

The Yiling Laozu comes out to play

Chapter Summary

Jiang Yanli gains little duckling admirers.

The Yiling Laozu goes off...

Jin Guangshan just needs to keep his mouth shut.

Chapter Notes

Edited 11/27 for grammar and correcting titles.

Thank you everyone for the positive responses and kudos! It's my first time writing something like this and the responses have been so encouraging!

I'm looking to update 1-2 chapters a week. Transcribing is taking longer with little ones running around lol.

You might notice some updates of the previous chapters in the next few days. Content will not change. Just possible chapter titles, summaries, minor grammatical fixes. Nothing major.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Glaring at their future selves, Jiang Cheng and Wei Ying shouted, "YOU LET THE PEACOCK TOUCH OUR SISTER?!?!?!"

Jiang Wanyin shot an unimpressed look towards the younger duo, "A-Jie can handle herself."

"Remember the dressing down she gave Jin Whatshisname during the Phoenix hunt?" Wei Wuxian began cracking up as the memory popped into his head.

"Jin Zixun." Lan Wangji supplied. There was a hint of disapproval in his tone that caused Wei Wuxian to break out in another round of laughter.

Jin Zixuan took this opportunity to observe his future wife. She had a lovely smile on her face as she listened to her brothers' discussion. Her features softened as she laughed along with them. *'Beautiful.'*

Jiang Cheng moved to block Jiang Yanli from Jin Zixuan's view. That damned Peacock had the gall to touch his sister. Wei Ying slowly turned to glare at the Jin who had been the cause of his Shijie's tears. They were NOT going to let that go without a fight. Nobody hurts their Yanli and comes out unscathed.

"PPPPEEEAAAACCCOOOOCCCKKK!!!!" They advanced on Jin Zixuan with clenched fists.

"Boys." Jiang Yanli called.

"But Shijie!!"

"A-Jie!!!"

Jiang Yanli gave them a fond smile and slightly tilted her head as if asking a silent question.

The Senior quartet openly gaped as Jiang Cheng and Wei Ying visibly deflated and turned back around right before their eyes.

Jin Ling, expecting a fight, had prepared to step in front of his father. Now he stood with his mouth hanging open and eyes wide in wonder at the sight of his uncles looking chastised by a mere smile from his mother.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin chuckled in commiseration. They knew that smile. They dreaded that smile. Been at the wrong end of that smile one too many times. Thank you very much.

"Whoa!" Lan Jingyi gasped out. "It's true! She really is the only person who could tame Sandu Shengshou AND The Yiling Laozu with just a smile and mere words."

"A Goddess among men who deemed us mortals worthy enough to descend from the Heavens to grace us with her presence. Senior Wei swears her soup can heal any injury!" gushed Ouyang Zizhen.

Wei Wuxian, Wei Ying, Jiang Wanyin, and Jiang Cheng gave sharp nods in agreement. Jiang Yanli truly deserved the best life could provide and the sooner people realize that the better.

Lan Sizhui, often finding himself stuck in the middle of Lan Jingyi and Jin Ling's bickering, stepped forward to Jiang Yanli, "Jiang-guniang, could you please teach me how you do that?"

"You're A-Xian's son. That makes you my nephew so you can call me Yanli-gumu." Jiang Yanli replied. Speechless, Lan Sizhui dumbly nodded his head. Jiang Yanli hid her smile behind her sleeve and giggled softly.

Jiang Wanyin crossed his arms and huffed in amusement as Wei Wuxian laughed at their love-struck awed looks.

"Listen mini-us, it took two punches from me before the Peacock got his act together in my timeline. It looks like the work is already done for you. Jin Zixuan is a good and loyal man. Nothing like his father or cousin. He even built Jiang Yanli a lotus pond with his own hands.

Just for Jiang Yanli. Give him a chance." reassured Wei Wuxian making sure to maintain eye contact with his younger self.

Jin Guangshan smarted at the insult to his character. "It seems Yunmeng Jiang had become lax in their discipline to allow such disrespect for a fellow Sect Leader. Or perhaps it is Gusu Lan who have fallen so low?" He sneered.

Every Jiang and Lan bristled in displeasure. Other cultivators nervously eyed the Sects in front. Unsure if they should step in to diffuse the situation.

Jiang Fengmian, "What are you implying, Jin-zongzhu?"

Jin Guangshan, "Just that -"

"Respect is something to be earned, Jin- *zongzhu* ." Jiang Wanyin cut off Jin Guangshan's reply.

Wei Wuxian, "Plainly speaking Jin-zongzhu, you are the last person in this hall deserving of any respect. Least of all from me."

Jin Guangshan's face began to turn more purple as anger rose at their words. "How dare the son of a servant speak to me in such a way! Know your place and apologize to those superior to you."

Jin Ling, "Wei Wuxian's the one that's superior to you. You do not deserve the respect your title affords you. Nainai is more deserving of that privilege for all the disrespect and degradation you put her through with your disgusting habits. You left me with a vipers' pit masquerading as a sect to run. Lanling Jin's reputation is now better than it ever was, no thanks to you and Jin Guangyao."

Jiang Wanyin, "Jin Ling."

"Jin Ling." Wei Wuxian walked over to put a hand on his shoulder, "It's ok to be angry and you are justified in your anger but he is still your grandfather. Choose your words and actions carefully. Learn from his mistakes and do better, yes?"

Taking a steadying breath, Jin Ling turned back to Jin Guangshan. "Wei Wuxian has had a bad hand dealt to him all his life and I have become quite overprotective of people disparaging him over the years. Please accept my apologies, Yeye."

Jin Guangshan, having never been talked to in such a manner since becoming Sect Leader, became more indignant. "You would speak to your grandfather in such a manner for that *indicating to Wei Wuxian*? I see your upbringing was lacking the fundamentals that teaches filial piety. I will have to make sure any future grandchildren of mine will be *properly* educated so they do not turn out like you."

Liu Rushi, "Jin Guangshan!"

Before anyone could intervene, Wei Wuxian's eyes flashed red. His body dashed forward to wrap a hand around Jin Guangshan's throat. "Lacking fundamentals? *You* want to speak of

fundamentals? I have led armies in a war that YOU were too much a coward to join. I have killed on those battlefields to protect my loved ones and retake my home while you pulled back your disciples from the fighting. I watched *your son* join a war and fought in YOUR place while you dallied your time away with prostitutes and servant girls in Jinlintai. I kept my mouth shut when you claimed credit for ending the war in the name of Lanling Jin like it was your due and not your bastard who ended Wen Rouhan's life."

"The Yiling Laozu...", whispered the boys. Heart thundering in anticipation. History books had described him as a demon without restraint or morals. His name drove fear into the hearts of everyone. The mere sight of his ghost flute was enough to scare away powerful resentful creatures. And now he's come out to play.

"Your greed destroyed the hard won peace that was supposed to come with the end of the war. You tortured, raped, and murdered innocent men, women, and children under the guise of "War criminals". And when I stood up against you, you had me destroyed. Because of you, I left my sect. Because of you, I had to leave my siblings.

Because of you, my name was spat upon and cursed as evil. My newfound family were slaughtered like sheep by the so-called *Righteous* cultivators in this very room. Unarmed civilians. Disabled and Elderly. Non-combatants who had no blood on their hands. A CHILD! I rescued them from YOUR labor camps. Labeled, by you, as war criminals because of their surname and the Cultivation World allowed it. Believing in your lies. Because of you, I lost EVERYTHING. So tell me, *Jin Guangshan*, who is lacking fundamentals here? Give me one good reason why I shouldn't gut you where you stand.”

"Wei Ying. Come back love. There is no threat here. Come back to me." Lan Wangji's words filtered through the haze as red eyes turned back to Grey.

Horror and shame swept the room at words Wei Wuxian bit out. Color drained from Jin Guangshan's face as he was dropped on the ground in an inelegant heap of golden robes. Fear crawled up his body as dark spots danced in the corners of his vision.

Finally feeling the arms wrapped around himself from behind. "Lan Zhan. Ah, I'm sorry. I lost myself."

"I'm here. You're safe. No need for sorry between us, remember?" Lan Wangji placed a kiss on Wei Wuxian's temple, drawing a smile from the younger man.

Jiang Cheng, "WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT?!?!?!"

Jiang Wanyin, "Leave it."

Enraged, Jiang Cheng rounded on his older self. "What do you mean 'Leave it'? He's dripping with resentment. What the fuck have you gotten yourself into, Wei Wuxian?!?!"

Jiang Wanyin, "Jiang Wanyin, calm yourself. He knows what he's doing. And has been doing it for decades now. He's only a danger to himself these days."

"He's always a danger to himself. That's nothing new" Jiang Cheng couldn't help quipping back.

Yu Ziyuan eyed Wei Wuxian. Contemplating if the boy was possessed. Zidian sparked in her hand as she debated the best course of action.

Noticing the reaction, Lan Wangji pulled Wei Wuxian behind him as Wen Qionglin flanked his left and Jiang Wanyin his right.

Lan Sizhui narrowed his eyes on the sparking ring. "Yu-furen. If you are contemplating on using Zidian on Wei-qianbei, I can assure you it will not work. Jiang-zongzhu... That is Jiang Wanyin has already...Wei-qianbei is not possessed."

Taking in the looks of horror around him, he focused his attention on the disciples. They have never seen him lose himself in so much anger and pain. Such a look will never cross their Wei-qianbei's face ever again if they had any say in it.

Wei Wuxian, "I'm sorry boys. I didn't mean to scare you-"

"Are you ok? Do you need A-Die or I to play Cleansing for you?"

"Are you hungry? I have some snacks here if you want!"

"Are you hurting anywhere? I have my emergency pack!"

" Do you need a hug? You said I give great hugs!"

Blinking at his four ducklings, Wei Wuxian's chest warmed at their concern and gathered the boys into a group hug. "Ah, I love you boys. Lan Zhan, our boys are amazing aren't they?"

"Mn." the corners of his lips twitch upwards.

Jin Zixuan joined his mother as they both bowed to Wei Wuxian. "Wei-gongzi, On behalf of Lanling Jin-"

Wei Wuxian interrupted, "Please save your apologies. I just ask for you to not take anyone's words at face value. Believe but question the motive behind it. People wear many faces, even with family."

Clapping his hands together, Wei Wuxian diverted everyone's attention so they could figure out how they could go back to their own timelines. "Alright, let's split up and look for clues on how to get out of here!"

Chapter End Notes

Next up... slight angst as the show begins. Brace yourselves.

Needles are a girl's best friend

Chapter Summary

Madam Yu... meet Wen Qing.

LWJ figuratively tells LQR to stuff it.

Chapter Notes

Hanguang-jun goes off... in Lan fashion.

Longer chapter because the characters kept wanting to talk.
I had to reacquaint myself with HTML codes lol.

Bold scenes from story

See the end of the chapter for more notes

'Shameless. Hanguang-Jun is shameless.' Lan Zhan internally chastised. Ignoring the longing that tugged at his heart as he watched Lan Wangji hold Wei Wuxian. ' *But Wei Ying had suffered so much in this future. Why didn't I stop him from going down the crooked path? Jiang Wanyin had said he could control it but what about the damages to Wei Ying?'*

His eyes scanned the hall to see everyone remained glued to where they stood. Jin Guangshan had been pulled into one of the seats by Jin Zixuan who was now on the side whispering with his mother.

Jiang Fengmian had a grip on Yu Ziyuan's arm while Jiang Cheng stood between them and Wei Ying. Jiang Yanli had her back to them as she spoke softly to a troubled looking Wei Ying.

Knowing eyes watched them behind a fan that was painted with the view of mountain tops peaking through the clouds. Attentively listening to the whispers and conversations that continued through the hall as one by one the cultivators recovered from their shock.

"What did he mean we let innocents be killed?

"The Wens are getting out of hand but what about the Jins?"

"Did you see how his eyes turned red?"

"I heard several smaller sects have been wiped out already."

"That's what I heard too!"

"Is no one going to ask them about the war?"

"We should find a way out of here quickly and prepare. Who knows what's happening outside right now?"

"What about Wei Wuxian?"

"Forget about him! What about the Jins?"

"What about them? They can't do anything if we refuse to listen to them."

"If what he said was true, the Jins are worse than the Wens!"

"That Jin Guangshan is truly shameless. His son needs to take over that sect to spare them more embarrassment."

"RIGHT!"

"Did he have to call us righteous in that tone of voice?"

"I no longer allow my female disciples to attend discussion conferences anymore because of that pig."

"I heard he tried to rape one if his men's wife!"

"Apparently even his bastard contributed more than he did!"

"He must be a powerful cultivator to be able to kill Wen Rouhan personally!"

"WEI WUXIAN! Are you expecting us to just ignore that you are cultivating resentful energy?" demanded Lan Qiren. The words the boy spoke that day in the Orchid Room echoing in his head:

'Spiritual energy is energy; resentful energy is energy as well. Spiritual energy is stored in the dantian. It can split mountains and fill oceans, available for human use. If so, then why can't resentful energy also be used by humans?'

Lan Wangji, "Shufu, Wei Ying mastered Resentful Cultivation three decades ago. Wangji will help when he is needed. No harm will come"

Taken aback by his nephew's easy acceptance, Lan Qiren looked to Lan Xichen only to see him looking worriedly at Lan Wangji but not saying a word. If Lan Xichen won't say anything then he will!

"Lan Wangji! Demonic cultivation corrupts the mind and harms the heart! It is immoral and goes against nature itself! Against everything Gusu Lan stands for. Gusu Lan will never

allow it nor him on its grounds!"

Noticing Lan Wangji's hardened gaze, Lan Xichen placed a hand on his uncle's arm to keep him from advancing forwards; "Shufu, perhaps we should let them explain. Wei-gongzi had mentioned something about the war. Perhaps something forced their hands. Wangji?"

Eyes narrowed and jaw set, Lan Wangji turned cold eyes upon his uncle, "Shufu, Gusu Lan Sect is not without fault. Not as righteous as you believe yourself to be."

Lan Qiren's face gained a red hue as anger seeped into his voice, "Are you so blind in your devotion to him that you would disregard the rules?"

Undeterred, Lan Wangji answered, "Rules are only excuses. Wangji devoted his life to the rules of Gusu Lan. Wangji failed Wei Ying because of those rules."

"Lan Zhan." whispered Wei Wuxian, trying to gain his husband's attention.

Unable to stop himself, Lan Zhan looked over to Wei Ying. '*I failed Wei Ying because of the rules? Was that why I wasn't by his side?'*

"You disappoint me, Wangji. You were raised by the precepts of Gusu Lan so you wouldn't turn out like your father. It seems all was for naught." Lan Qiren spit out, chest uncomfortably tight.

Lan Zhan's eyes widened at his uncle's words. Panic runs through him at the thought of becoming like his father. Lan Xichen hurried to mediate. "Shufu, please! We do not know their situation nor what happened in the future."

Lan Wangji studied his uncle for a while longer before answering, "Lan-xiansheng, Gusu Lan precepts failed to protect me. Wangji has learned how far your respect and love for me extended three decades ago. If Wei Ying is unwelcomed, so is Wangji. Where Wei Ying goes, Wangji will follow."

Color drained from Lan Xichen's face as his stomach dropped at his brother's declaration. Gusu Lan had failed his brother in the future to the extent that he would readily leave if his husband was not welcomed?

"You-" began Lan Qiren only to be interrupted by the sounds of a whip unleashing.

"A-XIAN!" Jiang Yanli cried.

The smell of burning flesh drew everyone's attention towards the Jiangs.

Jiang Cheng, "A-NIANG, STOP!"

Yu Ziyuan, "If I don't make sure that brat never touches demonic cultivation now, he's going to bring disaster to the Sect! Jiang Fengmian, are you still trying to defend him even now? You see the demon he's going to become!"

Jiang Fengmian was restraining Yu Ziyuan's arms as Jiang Cheng stood before her shielding his siblings behind him. Wei Ying was turned away from them and hunched over Jiang Yanli as if protecting her from an attack. Jiang Yanli sank slowly to the ground from the added weight of his barely conscious body, refusing to let him hit the ground.

Bile rose in his throat as Lan Zhan went to Wei Ying's side. Gently he took Wei Ying from Jiang Yanli and propped him up chest to chest. Keeping a hand on Wei Ying's wrist, he began giving him spiritual energy to boost healing. Wei Ying has been hurt by someone who was supposed to be a mother figure to him. Punished for something he had not yet done. Had he been punished for less than that?

Jin Ling, Lan Sizhui, and Lan Jingyi rushed to flank Jiang Cheng as Ouyang Zizhen continued to Wei Ying's side. Wei Wuxian found himself once again behind his husband and Wen Qionglin.

Jiang Fengmian, "San Niang! A-Xian is still a child. There are other ways to teach him without resorting to threats and violence!"

White knuckled grip on his fan, The Head Shaker addressed the hall as a whole. "Wei-xiong is not the evil one. Demonic Cultivation was not his choice. It was the only path left available to him. You, Madam Yu, lost the right to judge him the first time your poisonous words were directed at him!"

With a pained sigh, Jiang Wanyin called Yu Ziyuan's Zidian to himself leaving behind a shocked Yu Ziyuan and a visibly relieved Jiang Fengmian.

Wen Qing rushed over to check the damage done, Wen Ning following close behind. A long bloody trail ran from his right shoulder down across his back. The whip had ripped through the layers of the black robes and blood stained the edges of the burned robe.

Taking the emergency pack offered by Ouyang Zizhen, she gently cleaned the blood from the wound. In doing so she found several more wounds like it underneath the robes in various stages of healing. A pained gasp escaped Ouyang Zizhen's lips. Anger ripped through Wen Qing like an uncontrollable fire. She lifted her head and met her brother's eyes who looked equally upset. Wei Ying slowly came to as the pain lessened from the energy transfer. If anyone noticed Lan Zhan holding onto him tighter, they didn't mention it.

"There are several wounds on his back in differing stages of healing. Some as old as a few years, some as new as a few days ago." Wen Qing recounted as she stood up. Furious eyes firmly on Yu Ziyuan, "All caused by the same weapon."

Lan Qiren blanched at the doctor's recounting of the boy's wounds. All anger at the demonic cultivation was replaced by white hot fury at the blatant mistreatment of a ward by his mother figure. "Yu-furen! What is the meaning of this? This is how Wei Wuxian is being raised in your sect? Jiang Fengmian, are you allowing such treatment in your home?"

Nie Huaisang stepped forward only to be stopped by Nie Mingjue. Nie Huaisang pleaded with his brother with tears in his eyes, "Da-ge, please... he's hurt!"

Nie Mingjue, "It seems Yu-furen believes it is fair to punish Wei Wuxian for something he has not yet done. If we are to allow that, every cultivator here should be whipped as well. Perhaps we should start with the person who wields a whip against her unarmed ward."

"Wei Wuxian is a disciple of Yunmeng Jiang. I have the authority to punish the brat as I see fit. If I believe he deserves to be whipped for his insolence and trouble making then I will. You dare to tell me how-" Yu Ziyuan's eyes rolled to the back of her head and her body dropped to the ground in a heap.

Three small needles protruded from her neck as all eyes landed on her. Wen Qing looked away with a self-satisfied smirk. At everyone's baffled looks, Wei Wuxian doubled over and clutched his stomach as he laughed without restraint. "Qing-jie! Qing-jie! That was amazing!"

As if on cue, sounds of a flute began to flood through the hall as it slowly turned into a soft melody. The white cloth in the front of the hall begins to shift into different images along with the music.

A child is shown sitting in the lap of a female cultivator dressed in white and red robes. As the image pans out, they are shown sitting on top of a donkey being led by a male cultivator dressed in black robes.

Confused murmurs broke out in the hall. Was this some sort of trap? What kind of trick was this? No one has seen anything like this put into use. Even empathy could not be done on this grand of a scale.

Jiang Fengmian pulled the needles from his wife's neck, hoping that she would have calmed down.

“A-Ying, remember the things others do for you, not the things you do for others. Only when people don't hold so much in their hearts would they finally feel free.”

Jiang Fengmian and Lan Qiren froze at the sound of that all familiar voice. It may have been almost 16 years since they last heard that voice but there was no mistaking it.

Cangse Sanren.

Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying's eyes were glued to the scene shown on the cloth. "A-Niang. A-Die", Wei Wuxian whispered. A sense of familiarity overcame Lan Zhan. The child looked awfully familiar. Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan watched the scene with a barely there smile as baby Wei Ying turned a bright smile up at his mother. *'Cute.'*

The image shifted to show the Cloud Recesses. Teenage Wei Wuxian, Jiang Cheng, and Nie Huaisang can be seen crossing a small stone bridge. Laughing at a shared joke.

Wei Wuxian, “Do I not seem decent enough as of right now?”

Jiang Cheng, “You’d definitely be a mark of shame in his entire teaching career.”

Laughter broke out throughout the hall from the playful banter and eased the tense atmosphere slightly. The days when they were 15 and studying in the Cloud Recesses seemed so far away now.

Viewers are shown flying through the clouds until they stopped above a dark cliff. All around are rocks and cliffs covered with what looked like resentful energy. Crows can be seen circling the area like vultures waiting to be fed. Even though it was daytime, no light was strong enough to cut through the resentment.

“Wei Ying, do you know where this is?”

Wei Wuxian's stomach dropped as the memory of that day rushed back. The others in the hall racked their brains to place the voice. Wen Qing narrowed her eyes at the sound of her cousin's voice. Wen Ning glanced at his sister in confusion. Why were they hearing Wen Chao's voice?

"Who is that?" asked Nie Mingjue. The voice was grating on the nerves and he didn't even know who it belonged to.

Wen Qionglin, "Wen Er-gongzi, Wen Chao."

If they noticed the dark looks on Jiang Wanyin, Lan Wangji, and the older Nie Huaisang, no one dared to mention it.

Scene zooms in to focus on a group of Wen cultivators on their swords. Wei Wuxian is dangled between two of them. Wen Chao grabbed a fistful of hair and jerked Wei Wuxian's head back. “This place is called The Burial Mounds.” the voice sneered. "No living thing can enter this place and return. Body or soul. Don't dream of ever getting out of here."

Horrified gasps ripped through the hall as they realized what was going to happen. They collectively held their breaths hoping to be proven wrong.

Wen Chao's sword plunged through Wei Wuxian's chest. Laughter rang out as they watched the boy being thrown from that height; screams fading away the further he fell.

Jiang Yanli, "A-Xian!"

Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji turned their attention to Wei Wuxian. He had gone pale the moment he realized what was about to be revealed. Wei Wuxian never spoke about what happened when he had been thrown into the Burial Mounds. Whatever it was, it still affected him now.

"No one survives the Burial Mounds...it's impossible." whispered Lan Xichen.

Jiang Wanyin, "Wei Wuxian himself is a walking impossibility."

"WEI WUXIAN!"

Jiang Wanyin paled.

Jiang Cheng, "What the - ?"

"A-Cheng." Jiang Fengmian interrupted. That sounded worryingly like Jiang Cheng. But unlike his usual anger, this voice was filled with hate and disdain.

The white cloth changed to show black boots marching up a slope scattered with bones and dead grass. The image expanded out to show purple robes as they continued to march up what was actually a hill and began to blur out of focus.

The twinkling of a bell can be heard as the blurry image begins to become clear again; focusing on a front view of the purple robes. A Yunmeng Jiang Clarity Bell swinging from its belt. The image shifted again to focus on a clenched fist wearing a ring that was emitting purple sparks of lighting.

The Jiangs' attention was caught on the ring shown. *Zidian.*

"GO TO HELL!"

Shifting once again, the focus now on the hand wielding a purple sword as it found its target in the form of black robes.

Sandu.

Jiang Wanyin fell to his knees as he realized what was being shown on the cloth. *'No...Not this... Anything but this.'*

"Jiujiu?" Jin Ling asked, exchanging worried glances with his friends. He couldn't understand his uncle's reaction to what was being shown on the cloth. He was shaking worse than back then at the Guanyin Temple.

Grey eyes opened wide in shock; quickly shifting to understanding. An arm clad in black robes pushing purple robes away as the other arm holds up a metal seal drenched in resentful energy.

'Those eyes…' Jiang Yanli covered her lips with her sleeves to keep from crying out. Her brothers...

"Shit! Where is this coming from? We need to stop it." Wei Wuxian frantically looked around the hall.

Lan Wangji grabbed Wei Wuxian's arm to stop his movements, eyes still glued to the cloth, "Wei Ying..."

Anger in purple eyes gives way to shock as the image zooms out to show Jiang Wanyin gently being pushed back by a wall of fierce corpses. Grey eyes filled with tears as the image zooms out to show a sad smile on Wei Wuxian's face.

"Wei-qianbei??"

"JIANG WANYIN! GET UP AND HELP STOP THIS THING!"

The scene once again focused on the metal in Wei Wuxian's hand and more resentful energy is forced into the seal.

The seal shattered as an explosion rocked through the Burial Mounds.

Horrified, Lan Jingyi began to ask, "Is this..."

"... how Wei-qianbei died." finished Lan Sizhui.

“Great news! Wei Wuxian has died!”

Chapter End Notes

Edited 11/27 for grammar and correcting titles.

More angst than originally planned...

Buckle up for the roller coaster ride.

Possible next update: Fri/Sat

One Needle, Two Needles, Three Needles... Floor!

Chapter Summary

Wen Qing being petty.

Hanguang-jun the chaos gremlin.

Chapter Notes

Edited 11/27 for grammar and correcting titles.

All "Past" scenes will be continuous like the live action drama as opposed to switching back and forth like the novel/anime/etc.

Next chapter is getting the final comb through so should be up Fri or Sat!

"NO! No No No. I... why did I...?" stammered out Jiang Cheng as he collapsed onto the floor. On shaky feet, Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Yanli stumbled into the nearby seats.

Yu Ziyuan pulled her eyes away from the scene depicted, a smirk on her face. "So you finally had enough of cleaning up after *his* messes. Good riddance." she sneered.

"YU ZIYUAN! If you can not contain yourself, I will ask Wen-yishi to sedate you once again." Warned Yu-zongzhu, staring down his daughter before returning his attention to the cloth. His heart was still unsettled from the scene before. Crooked path or not, the boy was still his adoptive grandson. He watched him grow up and even taught him how to write his first talisman!

Jiang Yanli, "A-Niang... please. Let's not make a scene."

Liu Rushi pulled her friend to sit in the seats opposite where everyone stood. Her behavior was becoming more inappropriate as time went on and she's only embarrassing herself in the end.

Words began appearing on the white cloth in a narrative. A melodic voice read the words out loud.

"The Wen Clan ran amok, and people suffered.

Righteous Clans banded together to launch the Sunshot Campaign to oppose the Wen.

Wei Wuxian, the Yiling Laozu, contributed heavily to the campaign. Turning the tides of the war.

Due to his demonic path and seemingly infinite power, some feared him.

Envied his power.

Even tried to control him.

When he refused, they had him set up.

Thus, he became despised by the public."

If looks could kill, Jin Guangshan would have suffered a painful death a hundred times over.

"Does anyone recognize that voice?"

"Maybe it's the person who brought us here?"

Two cultivators sat side by side near the end of the hall unnoticed. The cultivator in white leaned in to whisper to his companion, "That voice... it sounds like my master."

His companion, "You think she had something to do with this?"

Cultivator in white, "She may not be able to help Shijie but she would let the world burn if it meant saving him."

From her seat next to Yu Ziyuan, Liu Rushi growled at her husband. "A war hero... reduced to nothing but a vilified outcast because of your greed. Will all the riches of Lanlin Jin never be enough for you?!?!"

A tea cup is knocked over.

“The Yiling Laozu has died? Who could have killed *him?* ”

"No one killed me." murmured Wei Wuxian petulantly under his breath. Lan Wangji stiffened and began to withdraw within himself. Grief overcoming all his senses.

Wei Ying barely managed a smile as he felt Lan Zhan's grip tighten around his pulse point and his breathing stuttered slightly in relief. He was then pulled off the floor and into a seat in front. Lan Zhan's arm wrapped around his shoulders to prevent his wound from touching the hard back of the seat.

“His shidi, Jiang Cheng, of course!"

Jiang Cheng whimpered and curled in on himself from his place on the ground.

The scene morphed to show the steps of Nightless City. Rows of cultivators lined up behind their sect flags as cheers broke out.

"Yunmeng Jiang, Lanling Jin, Gusu Lan, and Qinghe Nie have all taken the lead and burned the Burial Mounds to the ground.”

"Lan Zhan. Lan Zhan, I'm here now. Look at me, Er-gege." Taking Lan Wangji's hand, Wei Wuxian placed it over his heart. "Here, do you feel it? My heart is beating. I'm here, husband."

Lan Wangi, "Wei Ying..." Pulling his husband into his arms, he kept a hand wrapped around the pulse point on Wei Wuxian's wrist.

“That Wei Wuxian. What an ungrateful bastard! The Yunmeng Jiang clan adopted him off the streets and even raised him as his own child."

A busy market is shown as the viewers are taken down an alleyway. A child in dirty torn rags huddled in fear; weakly trying to wave away several stray dogs as they growled and bit at him.

"A-Ying?" The child looked up to see a face with a kind smile on his lips. The man wearing purple robes scared the dogs away as he handed the child a melon slice. "I've found you at last. Let's go home and meet your new siblings, hmm?"

The child's responding smile was the brightest the cultivators had ever seen. Forgetting the situation for a moment, several female cultivators cooed at the cuteness. A small smile found its way onto Lan Qiren's lips before catching himself and schooling his features. Coughing to cover up the slip up when Lan Xichen gave him a knowing smile.

"How did he repay them? Yunmeng Jiang was destroyed! He even defected when he didn't get his way! Prime example of biting the hand that feeds him!”

Lotus Pier is pictured as flames ravaged everything in its path. A flag with a Lotus emblem embroidered on it fell from where it hung to drape over a mound of what looked like purple cloth.

Feeling vindicated, Yu Ziyuan stood from her seat and stalked up to Jiang Fengmian. "I TOLD YOU HE WILL BRING DISASTER TO THE SECT! NOW LOOK! YUNMENG JIANG WAS DESTROYED BY HIM! COME TO YOUR SENSES WHILE YOU STILL CAN!"

Eyes glued to the destruction on the cloth, Jiang Fengmian gave no reply. Fear and terror clawing at him. '*A-Cheng and A-Xian survived. I know that much. But what about the rest of us?'*

Jiang Wanyin, "It wasn't his fault."

Yu Ziyuan rounded on him, "Weren't you the one who stabbed him? You're going to defend that disgust-"

Jiang Wanyin caught his mother so she wouldn't end up as a heap on the floor again and placed her in a nearby seat.

"She was warned." Wen Qing tsked as eyes fell on her. The woman needed some time to calm down and Wen Qing was more than happy to assist. If she felt any satisfaction in knocking the woman out, no one needed to know.

Jiang Wanyin, "If this thing is determined to show us what happened in the future I'm afraid she may react the same way again."

Wen Qing, "I have more needles."

Lan Jingyi whispered to his friends, "Sizhui, Wei-qianbei was right... your yima is terrifying." Three nods of agreement.

Rows of fierce corpses formed a barrier between Wei Wuxian and the cultivators trying to cut their way to him.

“Jiang Cheng was one of the main forces but his was not the killing blow. Wei Wuxian’s demonic cultivation had backfired and fierce corpses ripped him to pieces.”

Jiang Yanli, "Ripped..."

Jin Zixuan knelt in front of Jiang Yanli and gently took her hands, "Jiang-guniang, we'll make sure it never happens. I promise. We'll do what we can to prevent all this from happening."

Jiang Yanli gave him a grateful smile, "Jin-gongzi, please call me Yanli." Jin Zixuan stumbled out a reply, "Yanli... you... you may call me Zixuan." Liu Rushi vibrated with happiness as she watched the two blush bright red and shyly peeking at each other.

Staring at the white cloth Lan Qiren intoned, "This is the effects of demonic cultivation. It will slowly drive the cultivator mad until they no longer recognize those around them. Slowly killing them from the inside like a Qi deviation."

He may have been distracted from the topic but he will find a way to steer the boy away from the crooked path. He was not safe at Lotus Pier with Yu Ziyuan so if he had to drag him back to the Cloud Recesses then so be it.

"That's karma! His corpse army were like unleashed dogs, biting everyone. Not recognizing friend or foe!"

Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying both shivered at the comparison. Dogs... why did it have to be dogs?

"Three thousand cultivators were annihilated that night!"

"I heard that it was five thousand!"

Lan Jingyi, "They actually believed this crap? Are there even that many cultivators now?"

Jin Ling, "Five thousand? pft, More like less than 100." He crossed his arms over his chest and side-eyed the hall. Daring the cultivators to comment about not having done any of that yet.

'But... we haven't...'

Lan Sizhui, "Zizhen, wasn't your dad there that day? Did you ever ask him about it?" Said Sect Leader inched forward to hear the reply only to step back at Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan's identical cold stares.

Ouyang Zizhen, "I keep asking but he kept yelling at me and demanding for me to stop associating with The Yiling Laozu. I just stopped listening to his rants."

Ouyang-zongzhu, "Ouyang Zizhen! You!"

Ouyang Zizhen rolled his eyes and turned to his friends, "See? I'm not even born yet and he's already yelling at me! A-Die, go have a seat. Your feet must be tired from all this standing."

Jin Ling and Lan Jingyi had to hold back their laughs at the sect leader's red face. Yao-zongzhu and He-zongzhu placatingly pulled Ouyang-zongzhu back to a set of seats as he tried to give his future son a dressing down. Whispering to him about children needed to go through a rebelling stage.

Sounds of swords clashing rang out before Nightless City was once again shown. A strange array can be seen hovering in the sky out of view of the fight down on the ground. Cultivators in different colored robes were fighting each other as well as fierce corpses. A piece of metal can be seen weaving through the crowd as one after another, cultivators kill each other to get their hands on it.

"WHAT?!?!?!" The boys shot to their feet. Anger slowly overtakes shock at what they've just seen. Lan Sizhui's clenched fist shook as he held in his anger. He had to remind himself these people were not the same ones who wronged his dad.

"They blamed... they placed the blame on Wei-qianbei when it was THEM killing each other?!?!?!" Lan Jingyi screamed.

Tears welled up in his eyes as Ouyang Zizhen looked at his father, "A-Die... you... he... That's why he never wanted to speak about that day. That's why..."

Years after Wei Wuxian returned, Jiang Wanyin had gotten drunk one evening and told Jin Ling about the day Jiang Yanli was killed. That Wei Wuxian wasn't to blame for it. But he never spoke about what else happened there. Now he had so many questions. How many more things would the history texts be wrong about?

"What is that piece of metal?"

"I've never seen it before?"

“I heard back then, Wei Wuxian was number four on the list of top cultivators. He was considered a genius at a young age. How did he end up in this situation? Not even a corpse to his name!"

After Wei Wuxian’s death, everyone was still uneasy.

No one could summon Wei Wuxian’s soul. Not even the lone cultivator who desperately awaited his reply.

The Cloud Recesses came into view as the viewers were flown through the gates towards the back hills. A lone figure dressed in white is playing Inquiry on the guqin in front of him. Several spirits can be seen around him but none gives the right reply. Golden eyes became downcast as he played the song again.

"Wei Ying, where are you?"

"Wei Ying, will you still come back?"

"Wei Ying, please..."

Blushing, Wei Ying tried to catch Lan Zhan's eyes but he stubbornly looked away. Heart thundering and ears pink.

Curiosity peaked in Nie Mingjue so he inquired, "Does the spirit have a choice to refuse to answer?"

Lan Zhan, "Mn. Will always know when spirits show. Spirits can't lie but can refuse to answer." *'Did Wei Ying refuse to answer because I wasn't at his side?'*

"If even Wangji couldn't summon you, does that mean your soul was shattered?" Lan Xichen asked Wei Wuxian.

Deflecting from answering the question, Wei Wuxian stated "Ah, I have no memories of the time I was dead. For me it was as if only a day passed in between."

Lan Wangji, *'Even now he still doesn't answer.'*

Lan Qiren, "If his soul was shattered then that means..." He let the thought drop as his eyes landed on Wei Ying and then Wei Wuxian. The traumas of a war was enough to break any strong cultivator's mind. Combine that with demonic cultivation and being vilified. Lan Qiren closed his eyes. He can see how one would want to end it all.

The first year... nothing happened.

Second year... nothing happened.

Third year... nothing happened.

Finally in the thirteenth year... nothing happened either.

Nie Huaisang, "I wonder why they state the years like that. Is there something significant about the 13 years?"

Hiding his smile behind the fan, The Head Shaker studies his younger self. *'Let's see how long it takes for you to figure out why Da-ge died.'* His eyes flicker over to Jin Guangshan. *'As for you…'* He turns his head and shares a smile with Liu Rushi.

"A-Xian." Jiang Fengmian quickly went to kneel before Wei Ying. Making sure the boy is looking at him, Jiang Fengmian gestured for Wei Wuxian to come to his side. Lan Wangji followed close behind.

Grabbing both their hands he begged, "A-Xian. Please. Promise me you would never ever take your own life. We will do everything we can to prevent these tragedies whatever they may be from happening. Please. *Please,* promise me. You are important to so many people. You are loved by so many."

Wei Wuxian looked up at his husband with a fond smile, "I promise, Sect Leader Jiang."

Jiang Fengmian furrowed his eyebrows at the formal address but chose to address it later.

Wei Ying had his head bowed and eyes set stubbornly to the floor. At Wei Ying's downcast look, Lan Zhan's brow furrowed.

"Wei Ying."

Wei Ying looked up at his call, "Lan Zhan?"

Lan Zhan, "Would like to stay by your side. If you will allow it."

Wei Ying, "I thought you hated me. I annoyed you so much!"

Ears red, Lan Zhan forced himself to look Wei Ying in the eyes. "Never hated Wei Ying. Do not mind your presence."

Lan Wangji, "Mn, love Wei Ying." At Lan Zhan's glare of betrayal and Wei Ying's wide eyed shock, Lan Wangji's face seemed... smug? Wei Wuxian wasn't the only chaos gremlin in this marriage but people did not need to know that.

"Aiya, Lan Zhan! You're going to give mini-me a heart attack." Cackled Wei Wuxian. "Why don't we all sit down and watch whatever it is that's being shown to us? Looks like we can't get out of here until it's over."

Each cultivator that had remained standing took a seat with their own sect. The time travelers sat together up front with the exception of the Head Shaker. He's sticking to Da-ge like glue until it's time to separate. Lan Xichen took the seat to the left of Lan Zhan while Lan Qiren sat to Lan Xichen’s left.

The hall suddenly dimmed as the viewers turned their attention back to the white cloth.

A Soul Returned

Chapter Summary

Ducklings get soup.

Madam Jin plots.

Chapter Notes

Edited 11/27 for correcting titles and grammar.

Thank you so much for all the kudos and comments! They really help me gauge which direction I should take with upcoming chapters ^_^

Thank you for sticking this out with me! <3

A drop of black ink drips onto the cloth causing ripples as if the cloth was a pool of water. The ink spreads and forms into words:

13 years later...

Nie Huaisang let out a squeak as he excitedly tugged on his brother's sleeve. Lan Xichen laughed at his antics while Nie Mingjue became annoyed.

Nie Mingjue, "HUAISANG!" Making Nie Huaisang abruptly release the sleeve with an "EEEEP."

Liu Rushi went to remove the needles from her friend's neck. Yu Ziyuan sat up straight as she came to and looked at Madam Jin. "What happened, Rushi?"

Liu Rushi, "You were sedated when you became hysterical. We all agreed you needed some time to cool down."

Liu Rushi grabbed her hand. "Ziyuan, you need to pull yourself together. You are making yourself look unreasonable and to be honest, while I sympathize with your situation, I can not condone your behavior. Now, will you calmly join us or does Wen-yishi need to put her needles back in you?"

Still groggy from the needles, Yu Ziyuan put up a hand to placate Liu Rushi and nodded her head in agreement.

A run down room flashes on the cloth. A gust of wind blows through the cracks on the doors and windows displacing papers throughout the room. Alarming amounts of blood painted an array on the floor. The image focuses on a figure in black kneeling in the middle of the array. His face obscured by his bangs. His words run together as he gets more and more agitated.

"I didn't want to use this spell but they're too much.

With my blood,

drawn by my hand,

I sacrifice my body to you,

my soul shall disappear...

I had no other choice.

Take revenge for me, Yiling Patriarch, Wei Wuxian!"

Sparks of resentful energy enter the array as it lights up an eerie red. White light engulfs the cloth and blocks out the image

Slowly the image of the array trickled back in as the red glow died out. The kneeling figure collapsed to the ground as if whatever was holding him up let go.

Jiang Cheng, "Was that... Was that how you were brought back?"

Wei Wuxian, "Mo Xuanyu was so desperate for revenge on his family in Mo Village that he willingly sacrificed his soul to force my soul back into the world of the living."

Seeing through another's eyes, the image flickered a few times. Blinking to clear the vision only to be met with a fast approaching foot.

Instinct made some of the cultivators flinch away.

The man in black was kicked backwards and headfirst to the ground. A wave of nausea and dizziness kept him laying still on the ground.

Walking up to the white cloth, Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying studied the image. Minds working to figure out how they were brought here.

Wei Wuxian, "This seems like a modified version of Empathy. You are able to see and hear what the spirit or person sees and hears but not feel anything else. Almost detached yet not."

Wei Ying, "It isn't pulling on our souls or energies like Empathy would either. I'm willing to guess that there may be two arrays. One in our time, to contain us to this space as a form of Empathy."

Wei Wuxian, "And the other in my time with a time travel specification to bring us here when the boys were close enough to it."

'You dare kick the Yiling Laozu. How reckless.'

Anger radiated from those who knew Wei Wuxian. Whoever this person was, they were going to pay it back ten fold for that kick.

Wei Ying, "WAIT! Is it showing our thoughts too?!?!?" staring wide eyed at Wei Wuxian

Wei Wuxian, "Oh... no."

Confused by their reactions, the others looked to the time travelers for answers. Finding them looking confused as well.

A round face shoved its way into view. Bushy eyebrows sat on top of mud brown eyes. Face a sickly complexion. Spit flew as the boy began to shriek,

"Let me give you some advice. Don't daydream like that servant mother of yours. She was a servant. So you are a servant. Lowlife will stay lowlife. Lanling Jin's Sect Leader will never recognize you again after the crap you pulled!"

The Jiangs flinched at the familiar insults being thrown at Wei Wuxian.

Nie Mingjue, "Who is this brat?" His voice dripped with disapproval and disgust.

Lan Sizhui, "Mo Er-gongzi, Mo Ziyuan. Mo Xuanyu's cousin."

Jin ZiXuan stiffened at the knowledge that the man was one of his father's bastards. It seems his father has no qualms with bringing his bastards to Jinlintai in the next few years as a

threat for his compliance.

Liu Rushi clutched a fistful of her skirt to keep from lashing out at her bastard husband. *'Patience Rushi. Patience.'* No one threatens her son's rightful place as heir.

Jin Zixuan, "Wait... then does that make Wei Wuxian... my brother?"

Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Cheng shouted, "NO! He's my brother!" Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying howled in laughter. Jiang Yanli and Jiang Fengmian laugh into their sleeves.

Wei Wuxian, "A-Cheng... you two..." Everyone fought back laughter as both Jiang Chengs huffed and looked away with arms crossed.

Indicating the empty seat next to Liu Rushi, the Head Shaker asked, "Jin-furen, May I have a moment of your time?" Sitting down at her nod.

Nie Huaisang narrows his eyes as his future self cozy up to Jin-furen. *'He's up to something.'*

Nie Mingjue's "Huaisang's up to no good" alarms are blaring as he follows his younger brother's gaze to find the older Huaisang in a conversation with Jin-furen. He hadn't missed the hatred filled glares being directed at Jin Guangshan behind that stupid fan when he thought no one was looking.

On the cloth, Wei Wuxian has pulled himself up from the floor. Now kneeling, he leaned over the water basin. The face of a hanged ghost flashed on the cloth.

"GHOST!"

"A VENGEFUL GHOST!"

Rolling his eyes at their reactions, Wei Wuxian sat back down, "Calm down... it was just a painted face. Mo Xuanyu wasn't really an expert at face paints, you know."

Lifting his arms, he found several cuts crisscrossing them.

'Spirits summoned through this ritual are forced into the summoner's body and must fulfill the summoner's wish. These wounds will worsen overtime. If the wish is not fulfilled in time, this body along with my soul will be ripped apart.'

Wei Wuxian flinched at the loud shouts that came from very close by. He had hoped this part would have been skipped over.

Jin Ling, "You fulfilled Mo Xuanyu's wish didn't you? I swear I'm going to break your legs for not telling us about something this important!"

Lan Wangji, "Wei Ying."

Wei Wuxian, "Aiya... calm down. Everything is fine now. See? All healed!" as he pulled up his sleeves to show everyone.

'Wait...he didn't tell me his wish!'

The viewers watched with dread as Wei Wuxian shuffled through all the papers strewn about.

Plopping on the floor, Wei Wuxian pouted and kicked his feet like a child throwing a tantrum.

"Mo Xuanyu, how can you forget such an important step?!?!?" whined Wei Wuxian.

'Shall I humiliate them? Beat them down?'

Standing up slowly on wobbling legs, Wei Wuxian lifted his head to reveal a smirk that sent chills down their spines. His eyes flash red.

'Kill them all?'

The air in the hall seems to have been sucked out at that smile. The instantaneous switch from a childish Wei Wuxian to the Yiling Laozu gave some whiplash.

The Yiling Laozu, according to the rumors in the viewing said he slaughtered many, wouldn't blink at a few deaths. But the one sitting before them seemed like a completely different person.

The cultivation world expected blood and gore. Ruthless slaughter. Total destruction and annihilation if he were to return. Instead, here he was. Starving and being belittled by those weaker than him. Loud growls reached the viewer's ears as arms shakily crawled across towards the door.

'Don't tell me I'm going to be the first villainous ghoul summoned...only to starve to death the first day…'

Laughter broke out throughout the hall at the boy's thoughts.

Nie Huaisang, "Speaking of hunger... we've been here for a while. Is anyone else getting hungry?"

Wei Ying, "Ahhh Shijie's Lotus Root and Pork Ribs soup sounds divine right about.... now?"

As Wei Ying spoke, bowls and cups began to appear on a table in front of the white cloth. A familiar smell wafted through the hall as two large soup pots materialized on the table as well as pots of tea.

"Was that table always there?"

"I don't remember seeing it there... odd"

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin walked up to the pot and froze; eyes watering up before they each filled a bowl.

"Lotus Root and Pork Ribs soup. It's... it's Shijie's cooking! Lan Zhan! There's one without the ribs here! You can have a taste of Shijie's soup now!" cried Wei Wuxian.

Jin Ling rushed forward to fill himself a bowl, excited to be able to eat his mother's soup for the first time. Lan Sizhui, Lan Jingyi, and Ouyang Zizhen followed eagerly. Appreciative hums filled the hall as one by one the cultivators returned to their seats with a bowl of soup.

Lan Qiren, "Jiang-guniang, if this is a testament to your cooking skills, I am quite impressed. The soup was enjoyable." Everyone hummed in agreement.

Jiang Yanli bows in thanks, "I'm not quite sure how it happened but I couldn't be more appreciative to be able to provide some form of comfort."

Pulling himself up from the ground, Wei Wuxian made to leave only to find the door was locked. Voices drifted through the door that made Wei Wuxian smile mischievously. The servants, A-Tong and A-Ding, stood outside a door gossiping as it slams open, knocking the servants to the side.

A-Tong, "You...You...You...Do you want to die? I'm going to give you the beating of your life!"

Giggling like a madman, Wei Wuxian lands a kick to A-Tong's head causing A-Ding to shrink back in fear. A low dangerous voice spoke to the downed servant.

"How dare an errand-running child humiliate others like this."

Legs step over the unconscious body and continue to walk slowly away.

Mouths hung open as they looked between Wei Wuxian and the retreating back.

Nie Huaisang turns to Wei Ying, "Wei-xiong... you're really scary when you get serious like that."

Attempting to calm his heart, Wei Ying replied "I scare me too..."

Wei Wuxian laughed at that. "You know I can never stay serious for long! That's just not my way!"

The viewers are taken into the main house where villagers have crowded the doors. Trying to get a glimpse of the cultivators.

“It so happens that our family also has a young man who studied cultivation at a prominent sect-”

Servants' shouts can be heard as they try to wrangle a figure running through the courtyard. "Here! I’m coming. Right here! I'm the only one here who used to be a cultivator!"

The doors to the room burst open as Wei Wuxian comes barrelling through, tripping on the door ledge. He's saved from falling flat on his face when his arm is grabbed by one of the cultivators.

Lan Jingyi, "Hey! It's me!"

Looking up at the boy who caught him he noticed the cloud pattern on his forehead ribbon. ‘ *He must be a descendant of Gusu Lan. What a coincidence.’*

Troublemaking smile in place, Wei Wuxian releases his best madman giggle and he pushes into the boy's personal space and knocks him backwards.

"Are you the one that's hiding my things?"

"Wei-qianbei really took to acting like a madman didn't he?" Ouyang Zizhen asked. He wasn't there that day and was told in detail what had happened but this... he gets to see it himself!

The scene flashed to Wei Wuxian hugging a column tightly as servants tried to pull him away. Mo-furen shouting at him for purposely making a scene. Lan disciples seated

across from the column tried to hide their laughter when Lan Sizhui turned a reprimanding look at them.

Wei Ying, "He really is a mini-Lan Zhan! Does he go "Mn" like him too?

"Yes!" responded the time travelers, causing Lan Sizhui to blush.

Lan Qiren nodded his head in approval. The disciple truly did take after Lan Wangji. Seeing the proud looks on the faces of Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan made Lan Xichen want to bundle them all into a hug.

Wei WuXian, “He stole my belongings. I want them back. Does that also count as making a scene?”

Side glancing at the cultivators, Mo-furen spoke in a condescending tone, “Stealing? Robbing? We're one family here. He only wanted to take a look at your things. He's your younger cousin, what's wrong with him borrowing a few things? You're the older one, don't be so stingy with your things. It’s not as if they won't be returned.”

Jiang Yanli, "That's not how that works..."

Wei Wuxian, "Then return them."

"That woman is worse than her son. Who would dare act in such a way if she didn't allow it." Yu Ziyuan disapprovingly remarked.

The image flashes and this time Wei Wuxian stands before Lan Sizhui's seat.

"Next time, try stealing anything from me again. I'll cut off one of your hands!”

Mo Ziyuan's face scrunched up in rage at being so humiliated. *‘The lunatic dies tonight!’*

Lan Jingyi broke out in laughter as he remembered this scene. "Look, Wei-qianbei just predicted the future!"

Jiang Wanyin once again pinched the bridge of his nose. All of this was starting to give him a migraine the size of Yunmeng.

Wei Wuxian checked his cuts as he walked out of the hall but none had healed. Heaving a sigh, he decided to head to the stalls to cause more mayhem. No one runs wild like he does!

Back in the hall, Lan Sizhui blocked the door as Mo Ziyuan made to follow Wei Wuxian. The Lans bow to a red faced Mo-furen as they are ready to leave the family drama.

“Your family business is not our concern so we will begin setting up the West Courtyard for tonight. Please remind everyone of the things that I’ve talked about—after nightfall, close all of the windows. Don’t come outside or break the seals. It will be dangerous."

Lan disciples are spread out throughout the yard as Wei Wuxian walks by.

***‘Do I really have to kill the entire family? This forbidden ritual should have been long lost. Where did Mo Xuanyu learn it?’* Distracted by his thoughts, something fluttering caught his eye.**

‘The clans called for my blood but they still use my inventions all the same.’

Wei Ying excitedly turned to Wei Wuxian, "You finished them? They work?"

Jiang Fengmian, "What are those flags? I don't believe I have seen them before."

Lan Sizhui, "Those are Black Wind Flags. They use Qi as living bait to lure resentful ghosts and creatures to where the flags are. This in turn, allows us to lure ghosts and creatures away from civilians so that they do not become harmed during the night hunt."

Lan Xichen, "That's quite brilliant, Wei-gongzi! Control over where the fighting will be avoided any potential disasters to non-cultivators as well as structures."

Lan Qiren and Nie Mingjue humms in agreement.

Jin Guangshan eyes the flag and contemplates his chances of talking Wei Ying into selling him full rights to the flags. This will bring tons of money if he's cornered the use of these.

Lan Jingyi catches movement in the corner of his eyes. Turning he sees Wei Wuxian removing a flag from the pole.

Lan Jingyi, “Please go back to your room. This isn’t a place a person like you should be.”

Jumping down from the roof when he was ignored, Lan Jingyi shouted as he grabbed the flag, "Stop that! That's not something you should be taking! Give it back or I'll hit you!"

"Jingyi, 10 times."

Sighing, Lan Sizhui pulls out a blank talisman paper along with a brush and ink. He gets the feeling there will be more punishments to be meted out today for them.

Internally crying, Jingyi bows, "Yes, Hanguang-jun. Wei-qianbei, I apologize."

Wei Wuxian holds back a smile, "It's nothing Jingyi. I was purposely being quite annoying. Lan Zhan, to be fair he was polite first."

Lan Wangji, "Mn. Sizhui, take off 5."

Though Gusu Lan joined the siege against him, these boys were not a part of it. They're too young to have felt the sting of war. Wei Wuxian had checked over the flag drawn as they tugged it back and forth. Though inexperienced, the flag was precise and correct. It would only attract those from within 5 li of Mo Village so it shouldn't be any trouble. Wei Wuxian decided to stick around to lend a hand if needed.

Lan Sizhui, "Mo-gongzi, it is getting dark. It is going to be dangerous here once we start. You should head back. Please ignore any sounds you may hear and stay inside."

Wei Wuxian looked up to see the embroidered cloud patterns on his robe. A man wearing a similar set of robes flashed on the cloth as if it was a memory. The madman's smile dropped as Wei Wuxian crouched down holding the flag in his hands.

The image of Lan Wangji merged with Lan Sizhui as he crouched down next to Wei Wuxian. "Is everything ok, Mo-gongzi?"

"It's just a piece of cloth, what's the big deal? I can draw better than this!" As if snapping out of his trance, Wei Wuxian threw the flag on the ground in a huff and stomped on it before running off with arms and feet flailing.

Laughter once again filled the hall at Wei Wuxian's antics. The adults were having a hard time trying not to reprimand him because they knew what he was trying to do. But they at least were comforted to know he didn't outright slaughter the family. Even if they deserved it.

"Of course you can draw it better... you invented it!" Jin Ling laughed.

Back in the room Wei Wuxian settles against the wall and pulls out a leaf. As he plays a song, the image of the cultivator in Lan robes flashes into view again. Even though they could not see above his chest, in the man's hand was *Bichen* , Lan Wangji's sword. "Lan Zhan"

This song... Lan Zhan stares at the image as if it would give him the answers he needed.

In the courtyard, the song drifts over to the Lans currently standing guard on the roof. Lan Sizhui turns his head towards the song as if trying to place where he's heard it before.

Lan Sizhui, "Jingyi! This song sounds very familiar. We've heard it before."

Lan Jingji, "It sounds like a Gusu lullaby. Whoever is playing that song though... It sounds terrible."

"Jingyi. 5 more"

"Yes, Hanguang-jun."

Wei Wuxian settles in for a nap. It will be a while before the boys are finished anyways. The night sky gets darker as noise begins to filter through the doors, waking Wei Wuxuan up.

"Barge in and drag him out!"

"Notify the officials!"

"What do you mean 'notify the officials'? Beat him to death!"

"Drag the mad murderer out and make him pay with his life!"

He calls it Information Network, I call them spies.

Chapter Summary

Demonic Cultivation Rehab Center... no really.

Lan Jingyi prays to the deities to spare his arms.

Chapter Notes

Edited 11/27 for correcting titles and grammar.

This chapter feels very wordy to me. I have written and rewritten it 3 times already.

Throwing in the towel and moving on to next chapter because as people say, "You are your worse critic."

Until next time!

Edit: Thank you for all the positive comments and encouragements! It does my heart good when I'm stuck on how I want to portray a scene!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Are we missing something? A-Xian hasn't done anything but sleep in the room." Jiang Fengmian asked his fellow sect leaders.

Wen Qionglin, "I'm afraid even when asleep, trouble manages to find Wei-gongzi."

Flame torches convalesce in the West Courtyard. The whole household was awakened. Wei Wuxian is shoved to the ground in front of Lan Sizhui and Lan Jingyi. To their side, Mo-furen is wailing over a shrunken corpse on the ground. Left arm missing.

Wei Wuxian's earlier threat floats back into everyone's minds. Lan Jingyi's words now made sense.

"What are the chances..."

'Did something go wrong with their formation? My inventions require extra care to be used safely but I made sure it was correct before I left-'

Suddenly, Mo-furen lunges at Wei Wuxian.

Jiang Yanli shoots up from her seat, instinctively running to protect her A-Xian. Instead, she found herself wrapped in the arms of both Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin. Confused, she looked up at her brothers.

Jiang Wanyin, trying to calm his racing heart, manages to cry out "A-Jie... please."

Her A-Xian and A-Cheng are shaking. Jiang Yanli's heart breaks. Her brothers... something must have happened to her for her brothers to react like this.

"Shi- Jiang Yanli, please promise me you... Never EVER run into a battlefield. Never try to take a blow for me again. I don't care if you feel it is your duty to save me. You can save me just by being alive. A world without Jiang Yanli... your brothers can not be without Jiang Yanli."

Jiang Yanli, "You know I can't promise-"

Jin Ling, "A-Niang. You.. you took a fatal blow meant for Da-jiu at Nightless City and he lost the last tether of his sanity. Da-jiu was already blamed for A-Die's death and then he was blamed for your death as well. That was why Jiujiu...led the siege. Da-jiu and Jiujiu have never forgiven themselves for not protecting you better."

Swallowing down the lump in her throat, Jiang Yanli palms her brothers' cheeks. "You two have suffered so much, haven't you?"

Wei Wuxian easily stepped back to avoid the blow while Mo-furen shrieked, "It was you! You killed him! You bastard! He was just a child!"

Lan Sizhui stepped between Mo-furen and Wei Wuxian, "Mo-furen, your son's flesh and blood have been drained by evil spirits. Mo-gongzi did not do this."

Angered, Mo-furen shoved his hand aside. "You all heard him today. He threatened to cut his hand off! Just Look! I'll Kill you!"

The glint of a knife blade catches Wei Wuxian's attention. His mouth twitches, trying not to laugh, as he ruffles his fringe and lets out a loud wail, "Don't kill me! Help me! She's trying to kill me!"

Lan Qiren's eyebrows twitched once before he closed his eyes and tried to meditate. This is going to take 20 years off of his life by the end he's sure.

Running around like a maniac, Wei Wuxian trips over Mo Zixuan's body and dislodges his robes before sitting down on a nearby railing. Watching as Lan Sizhui picks up a Black Wind Flag that fell out of the robes.

Speaking loud enough for everyone to hear, Wuxian comments, "He even dares to steal this kind of stuff... No wonder the evil spirit possessed him."

"This is why civilians shouldn't mess with things they don't understand."

"Yes! They can't defend themselves from the foul without our help! Spirit possession is hard even for us cultivators."

Lan Jingyi, "Mo Ziyuan ordered his servant, A-Tong, to steal the flag to frame Mo Xuanyu and to get him killed in the process. Unfortunately, resentful ghosts and creatures don't discriminate who its victims are and he made himself a target with the flag."

'Three wounds equals three lives. Mo Ziyuan stole the flag and got himself killed. I created the flag therefore the ritual accepted it as my kill. An unfortunate accident.'

Lan Qiren, "The ritual seems to have lax definitions of how a wish is fulfilled. Wei Wuxian. You said you created this self-sacrificial ritual?"

Wei Wuxian, "No Lan-xiansheng, I found the ritual while I scoured the library at Qishan Wens' Yiling Supervisory office for information about... um research. Ah wait... the supervisory offices don't exist yet. Huh, anyway! I found a book about arrays and rituals while researching and Wen Qing let me read it. It was interesting so I memorized it. I later improved on the ritual to remove the archaic requirement for additional human sacrifice. Aside from self sacrifice, that is. I mean, can you imagine being forcibly shoved into a body and then find out you have to slaughter 50 children before you can even begin working on fulfilling the summoner's wish. If you don't complete it within the first day, your body and soul gets destroyed. How senseless and evil the ritual would become? So I changed it! I didn't expect for it to change the way it interprets fulfillment though. I still don't know for sure how Mo Xuanyu got his hands on it."

Nie Mingjue, who had been carefully watching the movements of the time travelers, noticed the sideways glance that Wei Wuxian threw towards the Head Shaker as he said the last words. Suspicion nagged at him as the Head Shaker calmly opened his fan to fan himself, not looking Wei Wuxian's way.

Lan Wangji, "After the siege of the Burial Mounds, Lanling Jin took possession of all Wei Ying's notes. Kept Suibian as a trophy." Anger flashed in his golden eyes at the memory.

Yu Ziyuan studies Jiang Wanyin as she states, "It is standard practice to return the sword of a deceased cultivator to their family. He may have defected but they should still have returned his sword to Yunmeng Jiang."

Jiang Wanyin couldn't meet his family's eyes. "I... Jin Guangyao knew I was in no state to make a proper decision after the events of Nightless City and used it to the Jin's advantage. I was still angry and he knew that in my anger I would refuse to take Wei Wuxian's sword. So when they made a show to present the sword to me... I did exactly as he expected. I refused to even touch it. They took no effort to hide that they were looking for Chenqing, the Ghost Flute, and I neglected to tell them that it was in my possession."

Liu Rushi, "Jin *Guang* yao?" Her hopes that this Jin Guangyao was a lost sibling of her husband was dashed when the Head Shaker spoke next.

"The Nies and Er-ge... ah, that is... Zewu-jun knows him as Meng Yao right now. Da-ge never told me why he was kicked out but I could only find out that Meng Yao was kicked out the same day the head guard died. Allegedly, Jin Guangyao turned spy for the allies during the Sunshot Campaign and was the one who killed Wen Rouhan. Jin-zongzhu recognized him only after he, Da-ge, and Er-ge became sworn brothers. Though he was named Guang instead of Zi, effectively cutting him from the line of succession."

Lan Xichen noted the underlying anger in the Head Shaker's tone. Although they were Nie Mingjue's sworn brothers, the Head Shaker had referred to him as Er-ge out of habit but Jin Guangyao is only ever referred to by name in a detached manner.

With downcast eyes, Wei Wuxian observes the Lan boys' darkened faces and clenched fists as Mo-furen berates them.

Mo-furen, "Worthless fools. What summoning spirits. What catching demons? You can't even protect a child. What good are you?"

Nie Mingjue, "This woman is a real piece of work."

The Lans' expressions all became dark with offense. This woman dares to treat disciples of Gusu Lan in such a manner.

' After all these years the Lan Clan still remains the same. What good is being so polite now? Let me show them how it's done.'

"Peeh!!" Jumping from the railing, Wei Wuxian blocks the boys from Mo-furen's view. The image focuses on Wei Wuxian's arm as they cross in front of his chest. Another cut

slowly healed and faded away.

Wei Wuxian, "A child? How old was your son? He was at least 17, right? He's old enough to understand the basic commands. Did they or did they not tell you to not break any seals? Did they not tell you to stay inside no matter what you hear? He snuck out at night to steal something that's dangerous. Is that their fault? Or his?"

Lan Sizhui and Lan Jingy's face brightens in grateful relief and the cloth becomes blank.

Lan Xichen stands to bow to Wei Wuxian in gratitude. "Thank you for coming to Gusu Lan's defense, Wei-gongzi."

Chuckling uncomfortably, Wei Wuxian waves off the gesture. "Ah... it was nothing. Really!"

The image returns as a talisman shoots out to land on A-Tong's forehead and activates. Resentment poured out of the body and A-Tong's corpse fell to the ground. Left arm missing.

***'A ghost repelling barrier? Impressive for someone this young.'* Wei Wuxian compliments as he sees the talismans glow to confirm it was still intact.**

Wei Wuxian's big smile and Lan Wangji's nod in agreement at the compliment made Lan Sizhui blush and Lan Jingyi straighten his back with pride. Ouyang Zizhen and Jin LIng bump their shoulders. Wei-qianbei is always free with his compliments and affection but to know he approved of them even before he even knew them was endearing.

Lan Jingyi turns as Lan Sizhui lands next to him. "We set this up earlier but it's not damaged. Maybe this thing wasn't a fierce ghost?"

Frowning, Lan Sizhui looks around his surroundings looking for clues. "Mn. One victim in seven days, possibly qualifies as an unsuppressed fierce ghost according to standards set up by the Yiling Patriarch. But three have been killed in a row. It's far more ferocious."

Surprised, Lan Qiren asks, "A standardized system of identifying resentful creatures?"

Ouyang Zizhen, "It's the standard basis all clans have been using for the past 30 years to help prepare for night hunts. Wei-qianbei has updated it throughout the years to include 25 additional rankings for cursed objects and man-made abysses."

Nie Mingjue, "Impressive. Do you think you'd be able to recreate it when we get back, Wei-gongzi?"

Wei Ying took a minute to think about what he would need to accomplish such a task, "Given time and resources I will be able to."

Lan Zhan, "Will help Wei Ying." Ears turning red when Wei Ying sent him a smile.

Wei Wuxian bumped shoulders with Lan Wangji to whisper, "I forgot how adorable you are at that age." To Wei Ying, he says, "I can go over the basics with you so you will have a starting point."

Lan Jingyi, "That's troublesome. What should we do now?"

Lan Sizhui, "Send the signal."

Nodding, Lan Jingy frowns before stating, "If there's no Seniors nearby to back up when we send the signal then..."

Lan Sizhui, "As members of Gusu Lan, we can't leave the people here to die. Even if we die... we must hold on until backup arrives."

Nie Mingjue, "Gusu Lan Sect truly are the model of what a cultivator should strive to become. Your disciples are truly exemplary."

The Lans stand to bow to Nie Mingjue in gratitude. Seeing the boys' camaraderie with each other, the future seems a little brighter for the cultivators.

Lan Jingyi whispers to Lan Sizhui, "Think they'll forget about my punishment?" Although he had meant it as a whisper, his voice was still loud enough for the elder Lans to hear. Lan Qiren clears his throat and shoots him a silencing glare causing the Nie brothers and Wei Ying to laugh.

The image follows the boys' determined gaze as it comes closer to the moon then to pull backwards to show a cultivator in white staring out into the night. One arm bent behind his back. The strumming of a guqin can be heard from behind. As the Cloud insignia blooms in the night sky, the cultivator turns to gather the guqin before flying in that direction.

Lan Xichen, "Inquiry?"

Wei Ying, "Lan Zhan! What's it saying?" When no reply comes, he looks to Lan Zhan. His eyebrows were furrowed as if displeased by something.

Lan Wangji, "Played Inquiry wherever Wangji went. Looking for Wei Ying. Souls did not know who Wei Ying was."

Gasping loudly, Lan Jingyi grabbed Lan Sizhui's sleeve. "Did Hanguang-jun secretly follow us because it was your first night hunt without him?"

Smiling, Lan Sizhui nodded. "Hanguang-jun always worried whenever I went on a night hunt without him."

The cloth switches to Wei Wuxian crouched on the ground as he mumbles to himself. Cheek supported by his left wrist. The cloth covering his forearm becomes transparent so the viewers can see the final and deepest cut heal and fade away.

Wei Wuxian, "Forget it, let's finish this quickly. I can't leave until..." Finally noticing that his arm no longer stung with movement, he pulls back his sleeve. The cuts have all healed. *'Mo Ziyuan and the servant's death would have healed two of the cuts. Then deepest cut would have been for Madam Mo. That means…'*

Madam Mo comes into view as her slumped form starts to twitch.

"What is this thing? It's possessing and killing in rapid succession!"

"Could it be a ghost?"

"No, it's too vicious to be one!"

Wei Wuxian felt a presence at his side so he peeled his eyes away from the scene to find Wen Qing standing in front of him. Wen Ning shyly smiles at him from behind her shoulder. The look on her face was so familiar that he instinctively held out his left arm to her without her having to ask.

Wen Qing's eyes widened slightly in shock at the action before settling back to a determined neutral expression. Grabbing his arm, she pulls up his sleeves to examine any scars before checking his pulse. She reached for his core and nearly dropped his wrist from the amount of spiritual energy coursing through his meridians. He and Lan Wanji look at her with laughter in their eyes as Wei Wuxian puts a finger to his mouth. It was a secret they didn't want to share just yet.

Nodding her assent, Wen Qing lets go of his wrist. "There are no visible lasting effects from the cuts. Your spiritual pathways and meridians are unclogged and undamaged unlike what is usually found in those who try to control resentful energy."

Wen Qing returned to her seat, mind occupied by what she's just encountered. *Have they managed the impossible?*

Time skips again as the viewers are brought back to see Wei Wuxian once again running away from a yelling Lan Jingyi while laughing. Mo-furen stood up slowly from where she had fainted. Her left arm twitched as she pulled herself up straight. The nails on her left hand begin to grow longer as the hand starts to flex. The image focuses on her head as it lifts and her eyes snap open to reveal the white pupils of a fierce corpse.

Wei Ying, "It's the left arm. They're all being possessed by something in the left arm."

Lan Zhan. "Mn."

Leaning on a column, Wei Wuxian observed as the boys pieced together the clues with a smile on his face.

Lan Sizhui, "The left arm! Get in formation!"

***'Those two are pretty good at this.'* Laughing quietly to himself, Wei Wuxian messed up his hair and let out a wail as he ran towards the boys. "Don't leave me here all alone! I'm scared!" The boys look up and roll their eyes as he runs behind them.**

Time skips again as Wei Wuxian caused another scene and runs to hide behind the rock formation in the garden. Mo-furen's left arm breaks free of the binding talisman and twists and aims for Lan Sizhui.

"Sizhui! Watch out-" Lan Jingy gets out before he finds himself hurling towards Lan Sizhui from a kick to his back. Incantations on his robes began to glow when the arm grabbed a fistful of Lan Jingyi's robe.

Quickly throwing off his outer robe, Lan Jingyi rounds on Wei Wuxian, "You lunatic, why did you kick me? Are you trying to get me killed?!"

"It wasn't me!" countered Wei Wuxian before quickly hiding behind the stone decoration again.

Lan Wangji made to add more punishment for Lan Jingyi's shouting but Wei Wuxian called to him. "Aiyo, Lan Zhan! He just lost his composure from my great acting! Give him some leeway for me?"

After a moment, Lan Wangji agreed. "Mn. If Wei Ying wants."

Lan Jingyi slumps in relief and shoots Wei Wuxian a bow in appreciation for saving his forearms.

Lan Qiren lets out an exasperated sigh. "Lan Jingyi. How exactly are you the Head of Discipline?"

Wei Ying doesn't hold in a laugh. "Who better to mete out punishment than one who knows how to interpret the rules and exactly how to circumvent it!"

Lan Sizhui, "That was exactly what Wei-qianbei said when he suggested Lan Jingyi to Lan-xiansheng for the position. Even Lan-xiansheng admitted that it was a great argument and he approved the recommendation. There has been less rules being broken as of yet."

Wei Ying, "So... how many rules had he broken for me to come up with this idea?"

Lan Sizhui, "Only one other person has broken anywhere near as much rules as Jingyi has."

Always up for gossip, Nie Huaisang asks, "Oh? And who is that?"

Jiang Wanyin deadpans, "Wei Wuxian."

Realizing the arm is repelled by the incantations on the Lan robes, Lan Sizhui called to Lan Jingyi. "The spell on the clothes work. Now!"

Jin Ling, "Da-jiu! Did you know about the incantations on the robes?"

Wei Ying, "Oh that's easy! When Jiang Cheng and I were at the Cloud Recesses for studies we had to wear student robes! Lan Zhan and I were attacked by fierce corpses once and I realized that the robes had incantations sewn into them. It only works once if the being was really powerful though. I've thought about trying to do something like that as well for Yunmeng Jiang when I got back home. And well... things happened."

In the back of the yard, Wei Wuxian casually walks up to the corpses of Mo Ziyuan and A-Tong. Smiling, he lets his eyes flash red before bending to speak into the corpse's ear.

"Still sleeping?" The eyes on the corpses snap open. Stumbling to their feet, they sway slightly; awaiting orders.

The hall is stunned silent. Here's proof before their eyes that Wei Wuxian has the power to control fierce corpses without effort. Aside from his madman act, his mind is clear and functioning at a high capacity. Everything they knew about demonic cultivation is being challenged as they continue to spend time with the demonic cultivator.

Finally finding her voice Yu Ziyuan screams, "WEI WUXIAN! YOU-!" Liu Rushi quickly pulls Yu Ziyuan to sit back down. Whispering to her in low tones.

Nie Huaisang, "Did... did he just..."

Jin Ling, "WHAT?!?!?!?! THAT'S IT?????" Turning to fully face Wei Wuxian while his arm points to the white cloth in question.

Ouyang Zizhen, "Wait. Wait. WAIT! Just two words?"

Lan Jingyi, "No blood drawing or complicated spell? You just... speak and... they do?" Arms flailing wildly as he gestured as if that would explain what "do" encompasses.

Wei Wuxian, "Ah... it is if you're me. Demonic cultivation in itself is difficult and harmful to master if you do not know what you're doing. This is a topic we can discuss once we're back in our time. It's not a topic for... current company." His eyes flicker to Jin Guangshan to drive the point home. Catching his meaning, the boys bowed and returned to their seats.

Lan Qiren looked thoughtfully at Wei Wuxian. "From your reactions, has Wei Wuxian not explained his cultivation method to you?" *'Is he not teaching them his tricks?'*

Lan Sizhui stood to answer Lan Qiren, "Wei-qianbei has explained the general common knowledge such as controlling the resentful energies with Chenqing and his talismans. As much as we ask, Wei-qianbei refuses to explain in further detail on topics he deems unsafe or harmful to others. Aside from a classroom setting or a teaching moment, Wei-qianbei does not speak about demonic cultivation. Though there are many who claim to be his disciples, Wei-qianbei refuses to teach anyone how to cultivate with resentful energy. This is the first time we've seen Wei-qianbei actually awakening a corpse. He will only do it if the situation is dire enough."

Jin Ling, "Any demonic cultivators we run into are given the Yiling Laozu dressing down before they are shipped off to the Cloud Recesses for healing or to Lotus Pier for rehabilitation."

Yu Ziyuan, "Rehabilitation?" Jiang Fengmian, also curious, looks to his older sons.

Jiang Wanyin, "In the years that Wei Wuxian was gone, I gained a reputation for hunting down and torturing demonic cultivators. In truth, only those who are beyond redemption and those who refuse to repent for their deeds are executed. Those willing and able to give up demonic cultivation are given resources and land to work so they can make a comfortable living. Those with... potential and aptitude... are sent to Qinghe."

"Qinghe? Why Qinghe?" Nie Mingjue asked. He was curious how his brother would run the sect after he was gone. The boy never liked to learn how to properly use his saber and wanted nothing to do with clan politics. Choosing to play with his fans, paints, and birds.

The Head Shaker, "I train and maintain the largest information network known to the cultivation world. Those sent to me are vetted and given training and jobs according to their abilities."

Wei Wuxian, "To put it bluntly, he has spies everywhere. If it happens, he will know about it before you do. Qinghe isn't the richest Great Sect for nothing, Nie-zongzhu." Wei Wuxian

catches Nie Mingjue's eyes and gives him a smile, "I've told him many times you would be proud of his efforts and accomplishments." Although his words were said with a smile, there was an undercurrent of a warning. *'Don't give Huaisang reason to doubt those words.'*

Nie Mingjue, "Though I am determined to stick around for a long time, It is comforting to know Qinghe will be in good hands. My brothers have good friends who support him. I'm excited to see what plans you have for the future, Huaisang."

Viewers are thrown for a shock when they find themselves in a dim dungeon. A figure with long black hair is slumped in a kneeling position on the ground. Thick chains welded to the walls are clamped on its arms, legs, neck, and torso; preventing it from moving even an inch. Hair had fallen to cover its face.

"*Still Sleeping?"* , Wei Wuxian's call filters through the air. The chains begin to rattle as the figure shakes its head to the side as if trying to listen for more instructions. Dislodging the hair that had fallen on the right side of its face. Unfocused white pupils stare back at the viewers as its head is lifted to reveal the figure's identity, Wen Qionglin.

Wen Qing stares up at the image of her brother chained up like a beast. Anger wells up inside her as she continues to watch.

From Wei Wuxian's tense shoulders, the time travelers knew he was barely holding his anger in check. They knew Wen Qionglin was locked up by Jin Guangshan for 13 years but Wen Qionglin hadn't been aware of his surroundings to know what had happened to him.

Wei Wuxian spoke again in a commanding voice, "Do you see the left arm on your Mom?"

Heads slowly turned to where Lan Sizhui and Lan Jingyi were battling Mo-furen.

"Tear it apart."

Blurs fly past Lan Jingyi as he is thrown back by the arm. Coming to a stop before Lan Sizhui, both boys looked up as the winds cleared. Their eyes widened in excitement as they were greeted with a rare sight.

Lan Jingyi, "Zombie fight?! Never seen this before!"

Neither had anyone else from the past. Sure, they've fought fierce corpses themselves but never a zombie fight. It was quite brutal and exciting.

The arm tears through A-Tong's corpse and Mo-furen lunges towards the Lan boys when a single guqin note rings out. The spiritual energy behind that note stops Mo-furen's corpse in its track. A second strum pins it to the ground.

Lan Wangji floats above the roof on his sword. Hands on the guqin in front of him, strumming the notes of Eradication.

"Hanguang-jun!" the boys shouted. Never mind the rule on Being discourteous and loud is harmful.

Lan Qiren, "Lan Sizhui. Lan Jingy. 100 copies each."

Collapsing further into his seat, Lan Jingyi cried, "hhhhhaaaaa????"

Lan Sizhui, "I beg your pardon, Lan-xiansheng. This disciple wanted to verify our punishment. You want us to copy the rules 100 times each?"

Not understanding the Lan disciples' stress, Lan Qiren inquired, "Is copying the rules 100 times something that distressing to a Gusu Lan disciple?"

Lan Wangji, "Shufu, Disciples now copy rules in a handstand. 100 copies will be cruel."

Lan Qiren, "I see. In that case, 20 copies each. You must maintain composure no matter the situation."

"Yes, Lan-xiansheng."

'It's him!'

From his hiding place behind a column, Wei Wuxian drinks in Lan Wangji's appearance. After so many years he has grown more handsome. Any trace of baby fat that clung to his cheeks at fifteen is now long gone.

'Lan Zhan. Lan Zhan. Still wearing those mourning clothes.'

Lan Qiren, "MOURNING CLOTHES!!! WEI WUXIAN!!! YOU!!!!"

Lan Xichen, "Shufu, I'm sure Wei-gongzi never intended to say those words out loud. If you think about the irony, he's now wearing said robes."

Chuckling sheepishly, Wei Wuxian rubs the back of his neck.

'Ah... I still love him like I did when I Was 15.' **With a sad smile, Wei Wuxian turned tail and ran.** ***'I have to get out of here before he sees me and tries to punish me!'***

Lan Sizhui briefs Lan Wangji of what had occurred at the manor before his arrival. About Mo-gongzi using demonic cultivation to help them throughout the night only to disappear in the excitement of Hanguang-jun's arrival. Lan Wangji catches movement in the corner of his eye and gives chase. He stops when he lands in the middle of an empty street. Looking around with hopeful eyes after 13 years.

'Wei Ying, is it really you?'

Chapter End Notes

Up next: Jiang Wanyin is over it

Sandu Shengshou is so done...

Chapter Summary

Jiang Wanyin is over it

Gremlin! Hanguang-Jun's come out to play

Edit: only minor edit where he mentions his mask 😄

Chapter Notes

Edited 11/27 for grammar and titles correction!

Thank you everyone for the comments and kudos! They keep me sane when I write.

It seems I can't write anything without it turning angsty so I apologize ahead of time. 😁 I try to balance it with cuteness but baby Wangxian has other ideas.

I keep flip-flopping on how strictly I want to stick to the timeline. Then my brain keeps inserting scenes all willy-nilly so I guess we'll let see how it goes lol.

The Hubby thinks I should do a special one shot when I hit 1K kudos but I have NO IDEA what I should write. Any ideas?

'A nightmare.' That's what this has to be right? A nightmare. The ones where your biggest fears give you hope only to smash it to bits. Lan Zhan is looking at him. Lan Zhan whose face is always devoid of expression. Whose eyes betrays his deep feelings. Staring at him as if Wei Wuxian has sprouted an extra head. His heart shatters. *'It hurts.'*

Something must have shown on Lan Zhan's face because hurt flashed in Wei Ying's eyes as he turned away from him. Lan Zhan doesn't like it. Doesn't like whatever conclusion Wei Ying's mind supplied him. He has to fix it.

"Wei Ying..."

"WEI WUXIAN! Please tell me I'm not hearing what I think I'm hearing." bellowed Jiang Wanyin; startling Wei Ying. "Not you! The older, more stupid you!"

"That depends on what it is you think you're hearing." snaps an irritated Wei Wuxian. He could recognize the look on Wei Ying's face and the direction his thoughts were heading to.

Lan Zhan had seen it too and was about to address it when Chengcheng started shouting. The angry grape.

Jiang Wanyin, "You mean to tell me that you and that shameless, petty, and sorry excuse of a brother-in-law of mine have both been stupidly and I do mean STUPIDLY in love with each other since you were 15?"

Lan Zhan's unfocused eyes are staring into the middle distance as his brain repeats *'Wei Ying loves me. Wei Ying! Wei Ying... loves me!'* on loop.

Curiosity got the better of the younger boys so they added up the years.

Ouyang Zizhen, "They met at 15. Senior Wei died when he was 21? 22?." Several stiffened at the reminder.

Lan Sizhui, "21."

Lan Jingy, "That's 6 years. He was resurrected 13 years later."

Jin Ling, "19 years?!?!?!"

Jiang Cheng, "You were pining for Lan Wangji for almost two decades like a love sick maiden?!? What the hell, Wei Wuxian!"

Blushing furiously as all eyes turn to them in surprise, Wei Wuxian weakly objected, "HEY! I was dead for 13 of those years! You didn't have to put it like that..."

The reminder that Wei Wuxian was dead for 13 years jolted Lan Zhan back to reality. Grabbing Wei Ying's hand, Lan Zhan tried to get his attention again. "Wei Ying."

Jiang Wanyin is so done.

Jiang Wanyin, "Oi, baby Wei Wuxian! For a genius, you're stupid. Lan Wangji willingly tied your wrists together with the Lan forehead ribbon. That means you're engaged. Bowing to an ancestor right afterwards means you're married. Congratulations, you and Lan Wangji have been married since 15."

'MARRIED?!?!!?' Wei Ying gapes at Jiang Wanyin like he just told him he's not allowed to pick lotus seeds anymore. Jiang Wanyin plops back down in his seat next to Jin Ling, arms crossed.

Lan Xichen's eyes study Lan Zhan, who seems to be growing more frustrated at being interupted. Trying to place when this event would have happened. The boys had gone missing for a day after he had sent Wei Wuxian to the Cold Pond to heal. *'Was that when it happened?'*

Lan Qiren looked like he wanted to Qi deviate and descend to the high heavens. Face turning a purple that can rival Sect Leader Jiang's dark purple robes.

Uncaring of the dilema he just started, Jiang Wanyin continues on, "You can now skip to year 19 of your stupid pining and profess your grand love. And look! Jin Guangyao's not even here holding a wire to your throat this time! You're welcome."

"SHIJIEEE! Chengcheng is picking on your Xianxian!" whined Wei Ying as he turned to Jiang Yanli causing her to giggle.

Suddenly, Wei Ying is gently pulling his hand free from Lan Zhan's grip. Desperation begins to claw its way up his chest so Lan Zhan gave a yank on their joined hands for Wei Ying's attention. Feeling a yank on his hand, Wei Ying spins back to look at Lan Zhan.

The momentum of both movements propelled Wei Ying into Lan Zhan's chest and their lips met. Eyes widening and cheeks flushed. Lan Zhan's free hand grips Wei Ying's hip and instinctively pulls him closer.

"FINALLY!!" the whole hall erupts in cheers and laughter.

At the show of impropriety, Madam Yu screams, "WEI WUXIAN!!! HAVE YOU NO THOUGHT FOR YUNMENG JIANG'S REPUTATION?!?!?!?"

"LAN WANGJI!!!! WEI WUXIAN!!! HOW DARE YOU BEHAVE SO... SO...! SHAMELESS. UNRULY-" a pruple faced Lan Qiren begins to shout.

"Causing noise is prohibited. Do not succumb to rage. Do not disrespect the younger. Do not make assumptions about others. Do not insult people. Harmony is the value. Be careful with your words. Maintain your own discipline. Shufu, please remember yourself and the disciplines of Gusu Lan." intones Lan Wangji over the screaming of the elders, effectively silencing the hall.

When Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen turn in surprise towards Lan Wangji, the time travelers bow their heads to hide their smiles. Hanguang-Jun only ever adopted this demeanor when he has to deal with Sect Leader Yao these days.

Wei Ying and Lan Zhan pull apart. Wei Ying covers face with his hands to hide his warm cheeks. A smile blooms on Lan Zhan's face as he watches. Wei Ying spins on his heels and ran to hide behind Jiang Yanli's seat. Grey eyes peeked out from behind her back. Finding Lan Zhan still looking his way, Wei Ying hides his face between her shoulder blades. *'Cute.'*

The meek voice of Nie Huaisang breaks through the stunned silence. "Perhaps we should return to the viewing?"

Returning to their seats, the cultivators once again turned their attention to the white cloth. Wei Ying still hiding behind Jiang Yanli.

The boys continue snickering and laughing at his reaction. Their Senior Wei may put on an act of being shameless but genuine affection given to him always flusters him.

Wei Wuxian runs across the courtyard after destroying evidence of the array from the room. Coming to a stop at the stables, he finds the donkey he had said hi to earlier as a madman tied up to a trough. Excitement shows in his face as he mounts the donkey and pulls her reins.

Except...

The donkey only stares at the crazy man on its back while it chewed on its hay. Unimpressed and in no hurry to move.

Once again, laughter fills the hall at Wei Wuxian's struggle with the donkey.

The scenery changes to lush trees lining the road that leads to a mountain shaped like a Buddha resting. Wei Wuxian sits near a well but moves to the side when rogue cultivators seemed reluctant to come by to refill their skeins. Suspicious of the mask on his face that he'd picked up along the way to help make his madman identity more believable.

One of the men walks around holding out a compass. "So weird. The arrows are not even moving and we're so close to Dafan Mountain already."

'Compass?'

His friend stands from the well and hands him his water skein. "Maybe your compass is broken. Buy a new one before going on more night hunts. We're about 10 miles out from Dafan Mountain so we can't rest for too long otherwise there will be nothing left for us."

Overhearing their conversation, Wei Wuxian inquired, "Excuse me! Is there something in Dafan Mountain?"

The men look over at him like they just noticed he was there. The second cultivator looked him over before he answered. "You probably didn't know Dafan Mountain was once blessed and boasted a spiritual spring but it for some reason it declined. Recently there are rumors of soul-eaters taking several souls."

"No. I don't think so. There's probably no monsters here. See? The compass' arrows have yet to move!"

Intrigued by another money venture, Jin Guangshan summarized, "A compass that that's meant to point out monsters?"

Lan Qiren hums thoughtfully, "It does seem to be very useful."

"Do you have one with you so that we may take a look at it?" Jin Guangshan asked the young boys.

All four look at him straight-faced and none answers him.

Wei Wuxian cackles and turns to Jiang Wanyin, "Look A-Cheng, Lan Zhan's been rubbing off on them!" Jiang Wanyin only rolls his eyes. Neither reprimanding the boys for their disrespect to Sect Leader Jin.

Wei Wuxian backed away as the two cultivators began bickering. Sometimes you get more information just by listening to people talk.

"Then why are there people exhibiting soul-less symptoms? Maybe your compass is broken."

"Impossible! You know who created this compass?"

"What are you implying? Of course I know! Wei Wuxian's crafts are not all perfect. Is his stuff infallible?"

"That's not what I meant. I never said his stuff are all perfect. Don't put words in my mouth!"

"His inventions aren't all fool-proof."

"I've used this for years! Never has it failed me!"

"You've got a lot of faith in him, don't you? What, is he your dad or something?"

"He is my idol!"

Having been thoroughly ignored, Wei Wuxian leads Lil' Apple away.

"Another invention, A-Xian?" Jiang Fengmian asked. The boy was known to think of ideas to improve on everyday things but he had never actually produced any tools of note.

Wei Wuxian, "It was something I tinkered with while at the Burial Mounds. I only made a basic prototype before.. before everything went downhill."

Jin Ling, "The Compass was one of many things Lanlin Jin commandeered."

A young woman runs up the mountain. At the top, she suddenly stops as she looked out towards a cave from the nearby mountain. Suddenly, as if pulled her body Jenks forward and she starts to dance and contort her body.

Once done, she contort her body into a final pose. Right leg bent and lifted in towards her left leg. Left arm lifted and bent towards her face while her right is lifted above and bent away from her head. The view pans around her to show Wei Wuxian standing to the side looking worried.

Behind him an elder female is running towards the young woman and desperately her name. "A-Yan!! Please stop dancing!"

They are brought to a forest where the sounds of a donkey in distress filled the hall. The scene changed to show numerous spirit binding nets littered the forest. Several had people and the most prominent one had a donkey thrashing about in it.

Recognizing the scene, Jin Ling slunk down in his seat to look less conspicuous. *A-Niang's going to kill me if Jiujiu doesn't get to me first.*

Staring up from the ground with hands on his hips was Wei Wuxian. *'A spirit net! Never thought I'd see one somewhere this remote. Must be someone rich... there's so many of them!'*

"Don't worry, Lil Apple! I'll find a spiritual sword to cut you down." Wei Wuxuan shouted at the donkey. The sounds of footsteps running warned him there was someone approaching so he hid behind a tree.

A young man dressed in the golden robes of Lanling Jin sprints through the forest. Bow in hand, he approached the net ready to tackle a creature, to be met with... a donkey.

"What?! A donkey?! Over 400 spirit nets and not even a ghost. A handful of no-clan losers and a stupid donkey!"

"A-Ling." Jiang Yanli frowned at her future son's tone. From behind her, Wei Ying looked between Jin Ling and Jiang Wanyin. Realization dawned on Wei Ying as he shot up from his hiding spot, "OH MY GOD! You're Jiang Cheng's personality in the Peacock's body! No, no.... that won't do. Big me! You need to intervene!"

Laughing loudly, Wei Wuxian shakes his head. "It's too late for that! He's doomed to follow in their footsteps. But don't worry! Deep down, he secretly has Jiang Yanli's heart and kindness. He doesn't show it often since he's inherited the emotional constipation."

Jin Zixuan, "Hey!! There's nothing wrong with my emotions!"

Jiang Wanyin, "Says the man who kept insulting his future wife when he's secretly in love with her. So yes... you are emotionally constipated."

Wei Wuxian shot Jiang Wanyin an unimpressed look while still facing Jin Zixuan, "Pot... meet kettle." Earning him an offended "HEY!!" from both parties.

"Lan Zhan!" Wei Ying ran back to his seat to grab Lan Zhan's arm. "You have to help me! Look at the great job you did with Sizhui! We can't let Jin Ling turn out like the Peacock!"

Happy to have Wei Ying next to him again, Lan Zhan grabbed his hand and nodded. "Mn, will teach with Wei Ying." Heart flipping as Wei Ying gives him the brightest smile and then shyly lay his head on Lan Zhan's shoulder.

Recognizing the insignia on his robes, Wei Wuxian thought, *'Jin Clan of Lanling. Rich indeed. Just my luck to run into Gusu Lan and Lanling Jin.'*

Jin Ling sneered at Wei Wuxian when he became fed up with his presence. "Get the hell out of my sight you disgusting lunatic!"

***'This kid needs to be taught a lesson.'* Wei Wuxian called after Jin Ling as the boy walked away, "I'm still your senior! Is that how your mother taught you to behave?"**

"What did you just say?!?!?!" Jin Ling whirred around and attacked with his sword drawn.

Easily dodging the attack, Wei Wuxian activated a talisman before placing it on Jin Ling's back. The talisman released a gluttonous spirit that expanded twice its size before falling on top of Jin Ling, pinning him to the ground.

"Lost before you could even start..." tsks Lan Jingyi.

Sighing, Jiang Yanli shakes her head in fondness and motions for him to join her. "A-Ling. No matter the words that are being said, you shouldn't attack people. You can solve more with words than violence."

Chastised, Jin Ling bowed his head. "Yes, A-Niang."

Jiang Yanli gives him a hug before pulling him into the seat between herself and Jin Zixuan. Jin Zixuan studied his future son. The boy seems to have grown into a man more settled with himself. It was obvious the boy loved his uncles. "if you'd like... we can spar at the back of the hall when there is a free moment."

Surprised, Jin Ling nods and smiles. Excited at the idea of finally being able to spar with his dad.

Kicking and struggling on the ground, Jin Ling cursed at Wei Wuxian. "Mo Xuanyu, you've really gone insane! Daring to study the dark arts? Let me up! You're a dead man

when I tell my uncle about this!"

Crouching down to get a closer look at Jin Ling, Wei Wuxian prodded, "Uncle? Why not your father? Who is your uncle?"

"I'm his uncle." a familiar deep voice cut through the night. Purple robes stepped into the clearing as the moonlight reflected on a Clarity Bell. "Any last words?"

Jiang Cheng couldn't take his eyes off his older self on the cloth. Sure he looked older but he also looked angry. Very angry.

Wei Ying stood up to take a closer look. "Jiang Cheng! How dramatic you've become! 'Any last words?', look at that entrance!"

Jiang Wanyin, "Shut up!"

The viewers are taken along the river where Wei Wuxian is at the river bank splashing his face. Voices of the released rogue cultivators float to where he sat.

"Wei Wuxian is a monster!"

"Jiang Yanli treated him like her own brother! She believed in the wrong person!"

Carp Tower comes into view as two figures stand in front of a large golden window. Their golden robes blended in with the light spilling in from the window. A baby cradled between them. Jin Zixuan dangles his sword's tassle above the child as it reaches for it. Jiang Yanli smiles softly as she hugs the baby to herself.

Jin Ling's eyes were glued to the scene before him. His parents doting on him as in infant. The years old ache and pain in his heart returns ten-fold. Warm arms wrap around him and he takes his eyes away to find his parents with their arms wrapped around him.

They're at the bottom of a hill. Standing above are hundreds of golden robes of Lanling Jin and several white robes of Gusu Lan. Archers line the edge of the hill all aimed at two lone figures walking in the valley below.

Nie Mingjue, "An ambush?"

Lan Xichen frowned at the amount of Lans on the hill. They were either there with his or the elders' permission. That was concerning.

An arrow is fired, unprovoked, but is caught by the Wen Qionglin. A man in golden robes stands before Wei Wuxian throwing insults towards Wei Wuxian. He picks up a box from the ground and sneers at it. "You think you have the right to give Lanling Jin's next heir a present? Remove the curse, demon!"

Wei Wuxian, angered and annoyed, shouted back "Who are you to tell me that when I was invited to the celebration for my nephew? I think you have a bigger problem on your hands. Focus on finding who cursed you because I did not curse you."

The box is crushed along with the bracelet inside it. Angered, Wei Wuxian, "YOU!"

Jiang Cheng, "Who's the asshole insulting Wei Wuxian?!?"

Speechless and confused, Jin Zixuan answered, "My cousin, Jin Zixun. What...?"

Jin Ling turned watery eyes to Wei Wuxian. "You... you brought me a gift? and that... THAT BASTARD... he destroyed it." Wei Wuxian gave him a sad smile.

Lan Sizhui held in his anger as he turned to a surprised Lan Wangji, "Are those Lans there on Sect Leader Lan's permission or the elders? History texts seems to have left out that LANS were at the ambush too!"

Lan Wangji had a hard glint in his eye. Wei Wuxian was Lan Wangji's bottom line. No one hurts his Wei Ying and leaves unscathed. He committed the faces of those Lans to memory for when they returned. "Jingyi, keep record."

Lan Jingyi, who had already began to memorize their faces, smirked, "Yes, Hanguang-jun."

Another set of golden robes moves forward to reach Wei Wuxian. A fist punches through golden robes. A white pupiled feral Wen Qionglin stood slightly in front of Wei Wuxian. Arm dripping in blood.

Wei Wuxian's angry expression morphs to shock, horror, and finally devastation as Jin Zixuan collapses to the ground. "A-Li's still waiting for you-"

"A-XUAN!" came Madam Jin's anguished cry. Those in the hall had to look away from the scene.

The family of three froze in their seats. Although it was never outright spoken of, Jin Zixuan knew that he had died. To have confirmation... it was jarring.

Growing up, Jin Ling had always been told that the Ghost General had been commanded by Wei Wuxian to kill his father. The truth about Qiongqi Path came out when Wei Wuxian returned, however, no one knew all the details. He blamed Wen Qionglin for his father's death for years until recently when he decided to let the anger go.

Nightless City looms in front of them. The clans are vowing to kill Wei Wuxian and scatter his ashes. Chilling laughter rings out as the clans turn towards the roof. Wei Wuxian sits on the rooftop twirling his dizi. "Wei Ying! Today you will answer for killing my son and nephew!" Jin Guangshan shouts.

Jin Zixuan sits confused at what he's seeing. "But... my death was an accident. Wen Qionglin was defending Wei Wuxian."

Madam Jin eyes her husband with unconcealed hatred. "It wouldn't matter. If it meant he got what he wanted, your death would serve only as an excuse to rile up the rest of the cultivation world against Wei Wuxian. Isn't that right, Sect Leader Jin?"

Scoffing, Jin Guangshan chose not to answer. Whatever it was his future self was willing to sacrifice his heir for, he will find out.

Wei Wuxian laughs, "Who was the one who said if Wen Ning and Wen Qing surrendered to Carp Tower that all matters would be let go? Whose ashes did you just scatter? Now, who's the one who said they will lay siege to the Burial Mounds?"

Hearing their names, the Wen siblings looked to Wei Wuxian for an explanation. He only shook his head and mouthed *Later*.

Lan Xichen frowned at the words.

An arrow is shot, once again unprovoked, this time it pierces his chest. Barely missing his heart. Wei Wuxian looks down to find the shooter, a Jin disciple lowering his bow, as he pulls the arrow free from his chest.

Jiang Fengmian is on his feet and turning to face Jin Guangshan. "Is this how Lanling Jin disciples are trained? To attack others unprovoked? That is twice now that A-Xian has been shot at without warning. I am honestly reconsidering the alliance between our clans."

"Jiang-xiong. Come now, you would let a servant come between our decades long alliance?" Jin Guangshan asked placatingly.

Having grown tired of the very same insults being thrown at his brother, Jiang Cheng stood next to his father. "Wei Wuxian is my brother in all but blood and the Head Disciple of Yunmeng Jiang. He is no servant."

Jin Guangshan scoffs again and turns back to watching the scene.

Jiang Fengmian narrowed his eyes at the insult to his son. "Yunmeng Jiang will not ally with those without morals."

The arrow is thrown back at the Jin disciple with deadly accuracy. It pierces his heart. "WEI WUXIAN! YOU DEMON! You dare to kill indiscriminately?"

To that, Wei Wuxian laughs. "I see. You are allowed to attack me with no repercussions. But when I defend myself, I am a demon killing indiscriminately?"

"A-XIAN!!"

"Shijie??? What is she doing on a battlefield?!?!" A frantic Wei Wuxian puts away his dizi to look for his shijie.

Never EVER run into a battlefield.

Jiang Yanli, dressed in mourning robes, lay in Jiang Wanyin's arms. Bloody slash down her back. Wei Wuxian, finally at her side, kneels before her.

"No!"

Wei Ying shoots to his feet, eyes unmoving from the Jiang Yanli on the screen. "Shijie!"

"I thought you said you could control it!" Jiang Wanyin screams at him.

"This isn't me! I've stopped already!" Wei Wuxian shouts back.

Jiang Yanli notices movement behind Wei Wuxian. Eyes widen in alarm as she pushed Wei Wuxian to the side. A silver blade pierces through Jiang Yanli's throat.

Never try to take a blow for me again.

"SHIJIE!"
"A-JIE!"
"A-LI!"
"A-LI!"
"A-NIANG!"

"WEI WUXIAN! You ungrateful monster! Jiang Yanli treated you like her brother and you still killed her!"

The world goes dark.

"I feel so sorry for her child. Orphaned at only 1 month old."

Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan slowly lowers themselves back into their seats. Not able to trust their legs to hold them up any longer.

Jiang Cheng and Wei Ying are collapsed on their knees. Nie Huaisang came to support Jiang Cheng into a chair as Lan Zhan does the same for Wei Ying as he numbly stares forward.

Lan Qiren watched Lan Wangji stroke his husband's back as the boy relives the worst night of his life. Jiang Wanyin was not looking any better. The younger boys looked as though they would skin every cultivator in this room if given the chance.

Lan Qiren doesn't blame them. The sheer injustice of what was shown made him sick.

'How could I say such a thing to him? How could I...'

The already distraught cultivators flinched when the sound of a slap broke through the thick atmosphere. On the cloth, Wei Wuxian had raised a hand and slapped himself for his words towards his nephew.

Shock and sadness shook his body when he looked at his uncle. "Da-jiu... please. Don't hurt yourself anymore. You've already apologized and I've already forgiven you."

Lan Xichen, "Why don't we take a short break? Perhaps there will be tea?"

As if by magic, pots of tea and tea cups appeared on the table in front.

Hidden by the shadows, a man in red leans against the wall. "Gege, are you sure I can't just feed him to one of the ghosts?"

"A-Ying can handle himself." Giggled the man next to him.

Vale of Tears

Chapter Summary

A Goddess gets hungry

A pig pisses off the wrong husband

Chapter Notes

Edited 11/27 for grammar and title corrections.

Thank you all for the lovely comments! They really do help me to plan the coming chapters based on reactions!

I've come down with a cold so the next update may be delayed a little. I'm useless when I get a head cold haha

EDIT: Wow! We've broken 1k kudos! Thank you so much everyone! I'll be writing the special one shot sometime next week after the next update =)

Black boots casually land on a stone pathway. Unhurried yet steadily approaching its destination. As it approaches a room, hands clench around a scroll before entering. Seated at the table are two figures in an animated discussion.

"Gege," Hua Cheng called out as he approached the table. Bowing his head to the person sitting next to his husband.

"Ah San Lang! I was just telling Baoshan-mei about little A-Ying's escapades while she was gone!" Xie Lian excitedly said, patting the seat next to him for Hua Cheng to join him.

Taking the seat, Hua Cheng unfurled the scroll in his hand. "This array was found in the human realm in Qishan. Normally, mortal matters are not our concern. However, there are elements in it that are cause for concern. The biggest one is its main focus."

Alarmed, Xie Lian skims his eyes over the array. Surprise overtakes his features as he asks, "Who is this being directed at?"

Attention caught, Baoshan Sanren reaches for the scroll. Depicted on there was an array to tamper with time. More specifically, to tamper with a target's timeline.

"Wei Wuxian."

A temple looms before them at the top of a mountain. Run down and dusty. In the middle stands the statue of a Goddess. She is posed as if dancing and her face is turned downwards with a faint smile on her lips.

'There's something familiar about that statue.' Nie Huaisang pondered for a moment. Where has he seen that statue before?

Snapping his fan closed, Nie Huaisang excitedly shouted out, "A-Yan! The girl that was dancing! She was posed in the same position!"

Lan Sizhui, "A-Yan was one of the victims of the soul snatching. After their lavish wedding, her husband disappeared while out hunting. She went in search of her husband only to return soul-less and withering away."

Lan Jingyi, "Yea, her father was at his wit's end so he went to the Goddess temple to pray for her soul to be returned. A-Yan's soul was returned but it was damaged after so long. In exchange, it took her father's soul "

Jiang Yanli, "The poor girl..."

At the bottom of the mountain, Wei Wuxian stopped to speak with a local hunter on his way off the mountain. Suddenly as if the hunter had said something alarming, he breaks off and runs in the direction of the temple.

"Damn it, Jin Ling's in trouble!"

"Even when I treated him with disdain, he still ran to help me.″ Jin Ling smiled.

Jiang Yanli swept the fringe out of his face, "A-Xian probably loved you the minute he heard you existed."

"If it can really grant wishes, then I pray for the soul-eating creature in Dafan Mountain to appear in front of me right now. Can the statue do it?" Jin Ling challenged.

A cold shiver ran up his spine as Jin Ling studiously avoided looking at Jiang Wanyin.

"Something to share with the class, Jin ling?"

Shrinking behind his mother, Jin Ling shook his head. "No, Jiujiu."

"A-Cheng?" a worried Jiang Yanli asked.

"Your son left out a few *details* in his night hunt report." Eyes still glaring daggers at Jin Ling.

Agreements joined the chatter as a rogue cultivator walks up to the Goddess Statue. "Young Master Jin is right! Let's see that soul-eating monster show up in front of us!"

The smile on the Goddess Statue widens. The rogue cultivator drops to the ground in a dead feint.

"What happened?"

"Is he dead?"

Lan Sizhui, "The soul-eating monster we here hunting turned out to be the Goddess statue. When Jin Ling made that wish and the rogue cultivator agreed, it took that as an actual wish... and collected on its prize."

Shocked but not surprised at what his son did, afterall, Jin Zixuan has personal knowledge of his future brother-in-law's temperament. If Jiang Wanyin raised him, he can only expect more careless words.

Flames burst through the temple causing everyone to shield their eyes. The flames forced the Goddess statue to abandon its attack and shrink back. Lan Sizhui looked back to the entrance to find Wei Wuxian throwing talismans at the statue. “Run! Get out of here and don't stop going! Stop slashing around! It won't help!”

Ouyang Zizhen studied the scene carefully. "Have you noticed how Wei-qianbei always somehow shows up whenever we need help."

Lan Jingyi, "I think that's just his luck. Chaos follows him remember?"

Twin snorts can be heard coming from Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Cheng.

The viewers are watching from above as cultivators spill out from the temple to run down the mountain. The ground rumbles and the Goddess breaks through the roof of the temple having tripled in size. Creepy smile plastered on her face as her arms fly out to attack.

Jiang Cheng, "WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!?"

The group of cultivators disperses at the foot of the mountain as Wei Wuxian catches up with the Lan boys.

"Kids! Kids! Wait for me!"

Out of breath, Lan Jingyi stops to look back at Wei Wuxian. "Who are you calling kids? Who are your kids? Do you even know what clan we're from?"

Lan Wangji, "Jingyi, 5 more"

"Yes, Hanguang-Jun." Lan Jingyi is dreading watching the rest of this day. He's going to be copying rules for years when they get back...

With hands on his hips, Wei Wuxian conceded, "Alright. Big Brothers. Big brothers, can you set off that emergency signal of yours and ask your Hanguang-Jun to come help?

Rolling his eyes, Lan Jingyi reached inside his robe for a flare. And came up empty. Patting around to make sure it wasn't dislodged, Lan Jingyi looked over to Lan Sizhui, who was also in the same state.

"The signals were used up at the Mo's manor that night..." Looking ashamed, Lan Sizhui looked to the ground.

"All of them..." Incredulous at the nod he got, Wei Wuxian had to verify. "And you didn't replace it?"

"...I forgot."

The Lans had disapproving looks on their faces. They always stress the importance of restocking night hunting supplies. It seems they will have to be more strict about it.

Stomach dropping, Wei Wuxian lectured, “Is this something you should forget? If Hanguang-jun finds out, you're going to be in so much trouble.”

Terror crosses Lan Jingyi's face as worry crossed Lan Sizhui's. “It’s over. We're dead, Sizhui. We are gonna be punished to death by Hanguang-jun…”

Wei WuXian, “Of course he should punish you! How would you remember the lesson next time?"

Wei Wuxian, "And you haven't forgotten once since then have you?"

The Lan boys hung their head. In the chaos that followed, everyone forgot about it. Both made an effort to never forget to restock flares before a night hunt again

Lan Xichen, "10 copies for each of you."

"Yes, Zewu-Jun"

Lan Sizhui ran to Wei Wuxian's side, "Mo-gongzi! How did you know that it was not a spirit-eating beast but the Goddess statue?

Wei Wuxian, looking for Jin Ling as he ran, "How did I know? I saw."

Lan Jingyi came up to Wei Wuxian's other side, "What did you see? We saw lots of things!"

Wei Wuxian, "Ok, you saw. So what does that mean? What can you find in these ancient tombs?"

Lan Jingyi, "Dead souls... what else would you find?"

Wei Wuxian, "Correct, there were dead souls. Therefore it can’t be a soul-eating beast. Simply put...if it was, with so many dead spirits in the area, would it choose to not eat them? No, it would have eaten them all."

"Hmmm I wonder why that is?"

"Yea, why would it?"

After a pause, several Lan cultivators there asked, "Why?"

Wei Wuxian gave them all a look of disbelief, "Ah, what can I say about you Gusu Lan disciples..."

Shaking his head, he continues, "You all focus on mundane nonsense things like cultivational etiquette, genealogy, and history that you're forced to memorize. Yet, important and practical things are not a priority. Think about it. If an apple is put in front of you and another is locked in a box, which one would you choose to eat? Souls are the same way. A body acts like the box, protecting the soul inside whereas the dead soul is freely roaming. Which would be easier to absorb?"

Lan Qiren bristled at the insult to his lectures. Lan Xichen, however, looked thoughtfully at Wei Wuxian. It would benefit the sect to have more practical knowledge to help them during night hunts.

Lan Wangji, "Wei Ying currently supervises junior disciples on their night hunts. His night hunts are most requested by the juniors and even some senior disciples."

Lan Xichen, "Perhaps lessons on practicality during night hunts will be an added benefit."

Sounds of crunching and chewing interrupted before anyone can say anything else.

Something big was crawling behind the bushes. And it was hungry.

All at once Lan Sizhui, Lan Jingyi, and Jin Ling shuddered. The memories of what's about to come gave them nightmares for days. Now, they're about to relive it again.

Cultivators scattered in horror as the Goddess statue stood to her fullest height. Blood dripping down her chin from the corpse that dangled in her mouth. Her arm flailing and contorting in different angles.

Horrified, Lan Sizhui fell back on what he had learned. "This... this isn't what's supposed to happen!"

At Wei Wuxian's confused look, he elaborated, "According to the Yiling Laozu, high level gods eat souls and only the low level ones eat flesh!"

Exasperation ran through Wei Wuxian. "Wei Wuxian was a mess at best! Why do you blindly worship him? Rules change depending on the situation. One rule may apply to one situation but not another. They need to change and adapt to stay relevant!"

Jiang Wanyin, "So you do know what a mess you are."

Wei Wuxian stuck his tongue out at his brother.

An arrow flew through the cultivators and pierces Goddess' head. Following the sound. Wei Wuxian spots Jin Ling on top of a nearby hill. Another arrow notched and ready to fire. The bow string is pulled taught and arrow releases at full force colliding with the side of the Goddess's head, pushing her back slightly.

Jiang Fengmian, "Impressive." nodding in approval.

Jin Ling blushed at the compliment. Proud that he was able to impress his grandfather. "Thank you, Gonggong"

Lan SiZhui yelled, "Jin-gongzi! Fire off the signal on you!" Jin Ling ignored the fellow cultivator. Notching three arrows at once, Jin Ling took aim.

'Spiritual weapons doesn't work on the Goddess. Then maybe demonic cultivation can.' **Unsheathing Sizhui's sword, Wei Wuxian made quick work of fashioning a flute from a thin piece of bamboo. Lifting it up to his lips, Wei Wuxian played a melody to summon something with enough killing intent to tear the statue apart.**

The shrill sound of a hastily prepared flute rung out, startling the nearby cultivators. Lan Sizhui froze in his place and Lan Jingyi scowled, "Why are you playing a flute at a time like this? It sounds horrible!"

Lan Wangji, "Jingyi, 5 more"

Jin Ling stood his ground as the Goddess statue moved closer. Jiang Wanyin's earlier threat drifted to his mind: *"If today, you don't catch the creature hunting Dafan Mountain, don't come to me ever again!"*

With his sword gripped in his hand, Jin Ling gathered his courage like a shield, '*If I can't slice off her head in one swing, I will die here... death it is, then!'*

Jiang Wanyin, "JIN LING! I didn't mean it literally! What is wrong with you?!?"

Jin LIng, "Jiujiu... I..."

The sounds of chains tinkling in the distance distracted a few cultivators. Its movement and speed made them unsettled. The Goddess statue paused as if sensing something powerful.

Wei Wuxian sensed the shift of energy in the air and lowered his flute. It unsettled him but if he can control it and it can help handle the Goddess statue, so be it.

The tinkling sounds stopped as a figure emerged of th woods. Recognition bloom on several faces before it morphed into terror.

"The Ghost General... It's The Ghost General, Wen Ning!"

Wen Qing shot up from her seat. Here was her brother. Except it wasn't her brother anymore was it?

Rain is pouring down as Wei Wuxian and a bundled up figure came upon a valley with hastily built shacks. Several golden robed cultivators stood guard as if guarding a prison.

As they got closer, Wei WuXian spoted an old, bent-over figure walking slowly while carrying a large flag. They move closer still. The elderly grandmother has a young toddler strapped to her back. The old woman was struggling to carry the flag back and forth so she was stopping very frequently.

Horrified at what they were seeing, Wen Qing and Wen Ning shouted, "Granny! Why... what are they doing to them?!"

Wen Qing ran over to Granny, causing her to flinch in fear before recognizing who had called her. "Granny! Where's A-Ning? Where's Fourth Uncle and the rest of the family? Where's A-Ning?"

The old woman did not dare say anything as Wei Wuxian was standing by Wen Qing. She looked towards the valley but said nothing.

The sight that met them was beyond horrendous. Prisoners forced to labor in the rain. All are pale and visibly exhausted. Dozens of Lanling Jin Inspectors on horseback with whips circled around them. Several even had branding irons in hand.

Gasps rang out as the conditions horrified the cultivators. The prisoners were all elderly. Some were even physically disabled yet still forced to work.

Wen Qing rushed through as she checked with single weary face. One of the inspectors noticed her and shouted, " Where did you come from? Who let you run round like this?"

Wen Qing, "I'm here to find someone!"

Losing his patience, the inspector pulled out the branding iron from his waist. "I don't care who you're looking for... Leave! Otherwise..."

Madam Jin's eyes widened. Her disciple was threatening to brand someone because she was there to find someone? She shot a glare to Jin Guangshan. This was his doing. Without his approval, who in Lanling Jin would be so bold.

Jin Zixuan stood from his seat. "He... what is he trying to do? Why does he even have a branding iron?!"

The inspector's attention was caught as a black robed man walk out from behind the young woman. His statement trailed off at the look on the man's face. His eyes were on the branding iron in the inspector's hand.

The branding iron sported the peony crest of Lanling Jin.

Wei Wuxian's eyes turned even colder. By this time many of the inspectors recognized him. Whispering amongst each other, no one dared stop Wen Qing any longer as she searched.

When asked again, one of the inspectors replied, "All of the people are here. There's nothing we can do if you can't find him here.

"All of the people are here?" Wei Wuxian asked. Voice cold and devoid of emotion.

Hesitating for a second, the inspector replied, "That's right."

Wei Wuxian studied the inspector's face. "Fine. For now, I'll take it that all the living are here. Then, where are the rest?"

A heart rending scream ripped through the night pulling Wei Wuxian to the edge of the valley.

At the bottom, lay hundreds of bodies. Men. Women. Young. Old. Children. All looked as if they were rolled down the side of the cliff without care or consideration.

Many of the cultivators were sick to their stomach at the sight. Sure, there deaths expected in war. But this... this was a slaughter.

No words came as they all looked on in horror.

In a pool of rain water kneeled Wen Qing. In her arms was a very brutally beaten Wen Ning. A lure flag stuck out from his abdomen.

Wen Qing's heartbreaking wails brought tears to the several of the viewers. Many had siblings of their own and couldn't imagine losing one the way Wen Qing did.

Wen Qing grabbed a hold of her brother's wrist just to remind her that her brother was still alive. "A-Ning..."

The inspectors huddled together, worried about how Wei Wuxian will react. "We can't let the other sects know about this. Jin Guangyao said the Sect Leader's orders were to get rid of any evidence if someone were to find out about this."

Using this distraction, the inspectors unsheathed their swords and began to cut down the prisoners to cover their deeds.

Nie Mingjue, "JIN GUANGSHAN! Is this how prisoners are treated in your sect? Even if they were guilty of any crimes, this is inhumane!"

Lan Qiren, "Xichen, perhaps Gusu Lan should reconsider our allies as well."

Lan Xichen was trying to wrap his mind around the fact that Meng Yao had willing condoned this. Actively supporting his father in his despicable ways. He had to have his reasons. Perhaps even threatened to comply.

Jin Guangshan chuckled as he watched the lies being presented as truth. These idiots may have been fooled by the demon known as Wei Wuxian but not him.

Jin Guangshan, "Even now you all do not see that the demon has fooled you all. The lies he's woven to control you! Lanling Jin has been besmirched by his evil tricks. I will bring this demon to heel and free us from this trap of his!"

Springing forward and drawing his blade, Jin Guangshan aimed his sword at Wei Wuxian's heart.

Moving to defend his husband, Lan Wangji unsheathed his sword and parried away Jin Guangshan's sword. "Choose your words wisely. Wei Ying will not be harmed."

Unaware of how dangerously close he is coming to being ripped to shreds, Jin Guangshan continued on. "The world will not allow you to live when they find out about your crooked ways! You may have them all fooled but I will expose you as the demon you are and free Lan Wangji from this disgusting sham of a marriage!"

The air slowly becomes dense with resentful energy. White cloth shoots forward and wraps around Jin Guangshan; violently lifting him up above the cultivators' heads.

Within seconds the time travelers move in quick succession, Jiang Wanyin moves to shield Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Yanli as Jin Ling shields Jin Zixuan. Lan Sizhui moves to Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen. Lan Jingyi shields Madam Yu and Madam Jin. Wen Qionglin stands before Wen Qing and Wen Ning. The Head Shaker stands in front of Nie Mingjue and Nie Huaisang with his fan opened by his side. Ouyang Zizhen shifts to shield Lan Zhan and Wei Ying.

The remaining cultivators in the hall stands on shaking feet to draw their swords though the oppressive atmosphere gives them pause. They ultimately chose defense is the best option right now and waits.

Jin Guangshan, "WEI WUXIAN! RELEASE ME YOU DEMON!"

"He's not the one you should be worried about" came a deep voice.

Stepping out from the shadows, Hua Cheng and Xie Lian made their presence known. *Rouye* was wrapped around Jin Guangshan.

Surprised at their presence, Wei Wuxian bowed to them in greeting. "Taizi Dianxia. Hua Chengzhu."

Xie Lian smiled at him while while Hua Cheng nodded his head in acknowledgement.

Hua Cheng narrowed his eyes towards Jin Guangshan. "I take it back, I wouldn't even feed this disgusting human to any of my ghosts, Gege. They'll get indigestion."

Not noticing the large shift in spiritual energy, Jin Guangshan ran his mouth, "You dare to attack a Sect Leader? This is an act of war! I will have you-"

Within a blink of an eye, *E-Ming* is against his throat. "Finish that sentence. First you threaten A-Ying and now you threaten my husband. Let's see if your luck runs out today."

Lan Qiren, "Jin-zongzhu, please remember yourself! You may choose not to believe what we are being shown but it is not your place to judge their marriage."

Scoffing, Jin Guangshan looked down his nose at Lan Qiren. "Lan-xiansheng, do not think yourself so perfect. You stand before me as your nephew disrespects my sect and say nothing. Perhaps Lan-zongzhu and Lan-xiansheng should listen to your elders and have the disobedience whipped from Lan Wangji!"

Wei Wuxian's eyes flashed red at those words, "JIN GUANGSHAN!"

Chuckling, Hua Cheng sheathed *E-Ming*. "I almost feel bad for you."

Allowing the anger he's kept at bay to bubble over inside him, Wei Wuxian addresses the man before him. "Where do you get the nerve, Jin Guangshan? Do you believe yourself invincible even now? Don't think for a moment I don't know of your deeds. The depravity and immorality you wallow in. You have ghosts whom haunts you, Jin Guangshan."

Rouye releases as dark wisps of resentful energy wraps itself around Jin Guangshan. Bringing him closer to Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian, "The spirits like to talk, Jin Guangshan. Would you like for me to call upon every single woman you have raped and killed? Every single man you've tortured for your wealth?"

Jin Guangshan's face paled at the threat. He's paid a handsome amount to silence everyone involved in his escapades. If word got out, he'll be destroyed or worse killed.

Wei Wuxian sneers at the man, "You... I will leave your fate to your wife. She's the one you should fear and beg forgiveness of as she has every right to. The you right now has not perpetrated the acts of my timeline so I will not kill you today. One step out of line, I will show you exactly how I avenged my Shidis and shimeis when I hunted down Wen Chao. Then again... you'll probably see anyways of this viewing continues."

Turning to Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen, Wei Wuxian continued, "As for the Lan elders, don't think that I've forgotten what they did to my husband. Their day will come and I will not be merciful."

Dread and fear ran down their spines. What have the Lan elders done?

Melody in the Wind

Chapter Summary

Meet the parents?

Hanguang-Jun does not run...

Chapter Notes

Surprise! Apparently I had only uploaded half the chapter yesterday after checking for formatting and forgot to replace it with the completed chapter.

So here's the second half in a chapter of its own! I'm sorry if it caused any confusion!

Until next time!

"A mere servant and a clanless nobody dares to threaten and attack a Sect Leader. Lanling Jin will bury you! No matter how brave you are, there will be repercussions!" Jin Guangshan screamed.

Laughter, deep and menacing, broke through the tense atmosphere making the hall feel even more chilled. "I'd like to see you try, *human.*"

Madam Jin, "Lanling Jin will seek no retribution for any insults its current *Sect Leader* feels is directed at him."

Jin Guangshan, "YOU! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO CONTRADICT ME!"

Jin Zixuan, "Then as Sect Heir, I command it. That is my right. Is it not, Father?"

Wei Ying and Jiang Cheng exchange impressed looks. So the Peacock has some backbone after all.

"Wei Ying?" Lan Wangji asked Wei Wuxian. His eyes were on the two strangers who seem familiar enough with Wei Wuxian to call him A-Ying. Two very powerful strangers if their spiritual energies were any indication.

"Care to introduce us, Wei Wuxian?" Jiang Wanyin had felt the sheer amount of spiritual energy radiating off these two strangers as well.

Wei Ying watched as the two strangers interacted with Wei Wuxian. There was something familiar about the one in white.

Wei Ying, "I know you... don't I?"

Smiling at Wei Ying, Xie Lian fondly replied, "A lost boy once came to my shrine to pray that his parents would come back. I wasn't able to fulfill that wish but I was able to guide someone who could give you a home to you."

Then his eyes hardened as it fell upon Madam Yu. "If I had known the kind of home you were to be brought into, I would have just let you stay with me."

Whispers of "Pray?" and "shrine?" floated about.

Wei Wuxian smiled and turned to the two who have practically became his father figures. "Everyone, this is Taizi Dianxia of the Heavenly Court, Xie Lian and his husband, Crimson Rain Sought Flower, Hua Cheng."

"Cr-Crimson Rain S-Sought Flower? As in... The... The Ghost King?" stuttered Jin Guangshan from where he was still hung up by resentful energy.

"The one and only." came Hua Cheng's dry reply. *And you just insulted my husband*, was left unsaid. He was enjoying seeing blood draining from the man's face.

Stunned silence overtook the hall as the cultivators stared at the Heavenly God and the Ghost King. Then as one they all dropped into kowtows.

Lan Wangji stepped forward to bow to the two men. "This one is Lan Zhan. Lan Wangji. Thank you for protecting my husband."

"Ah you must be *THE* Lan Zhan we've heard so much about!" exclaimed Xie Lian. "When we found A-Ying all those years ago, the only thing keeping his humanity was speaking about *his* Lan Zhan."

Blushing, Wei Wuxian hid his face behind Lan Wangji's shoulder. "Xie-gege... don't pick on poor A-Ying..."

Hua Cheng appraised Lan Wangji with arms crossed. The man was serious and spoke only when needed. Cold and aloof to A-Ying's warmth and friendly. As long as he loves A-Ying, that's all that matters. "The Heavenly and Ghostly Realms do not get involved with the mortal realm. When we found out that A-Ying had been summoned back to the mortal realm, we could not interfere."

Lan Wangji turned his gaze to his husband. "Summoned... back?"

Xie Lian, "San Lang and I were summoned, by name, to the Burial Mounds 28 years ago by a desperate prayer to protect the innocent inhabitants there. When we arrived, however, it was too late. All that was left were burnt huts and destroyed furniture."

Hua Cheng's eyes were on Wei Wuxian, "A single ghost flame lingered by a pool of what looked to be blood as if guarding it. I was able to convince the spirit to come back to the Ghost City with me."

Pulling his husband close, Lan Wangji gently swept a stray strand of hair away, "Was that where you were for those 13 years?"

Smiling at the loving gesture, Xie Lian explained further. "The flame was able to tell us its name was A-Ying and nothing else. His soul was so shattered, it took both San Lang and I years to recover all the pieces. Though, it did resist being repaired"

Hua Cheng, "The brat was able to manifest into his human form as his soul slowly repaired. However, he was a toddler when he first manifested." His voice gained a very tiresome tinge to it causing Wei Wuxian to chuckle awkwardly. There was a story there...

Xie Lian walked up to Wei Ying and gently laid a hand on his head, "It was then that I recognized him as the little boy from my shrine and it saddened me to know that he had suffered so much that he willingly shattered his soul."

Jiang Fengmian, "Willingly shattered his soul...?"

Jiang Wanyin closed his eyes and allowed the guilt to course through his body. He was the cause of most of his brother's suffering. If he had just trusted Wei Wuxian. Fought for him...

Giving the Jiang Sect Leader a look full of judgement, Hua Cheng continued, "As more soul fragments were found and repaired, his body aged, grew, and his memory returned. Some were good. Most were bad. He became withdrawn and distant. Then the memories of *his* Lan Zhan returned."

Blushing bright red, Wei Wuxian tried to change the subject. "But wait, why are you here? Were you caught in the array as well?"

Sharing a glance, Xie Lian explained, "San Lang found an array in Qishan that was concerning and brought it back for us to study. Turns out, the array specifically targeted you with intent to tamper with your timeline."

Wei Wuxian, eyes flicking to the Head Shaker, "To alter my timeline? Someone wanted to change past events using me?"

Catching the eye movement, Hua Cheng turned to the Head Shaker. "Sect Leader Nie, is it? From what I have come to know about you, is this your doing?"

Flicking his fan open and covering the lower half of his face, The Head Shaker replied, "I don't know what you're implying. I really don't know."

Nie Mingjue narrowed his eyes at his brother.

Clasping his hands in front of himself, Xie Lian smiled, "Well then! Let's continue with the viewing shall we? We can discuss matters as they come up. Oh! Madam Jin, What shall we do with your... husband?"

Not sparing said husband a glance, Madam Jin bowed. "The man's determined to get himself killed, something tells me he may not be leaving here with us. I'll defer to you in this case."

Smiling brightly, Xie Lian turned to Wen Qing, "Young Lady Wen, could you do us a favor and paralyze Sect Leader Jin so that A-Ying can release the resentful energies? I would hate for anything to happen to him if he were to attack A-Ying again."

Wen Qing startled at being addressed. If it gave her the chance to stick her needles into the bastard, she'll take the chance.

"Impossible!"

"I thought the Ghost General was killed before the First Siege of the Burial Mounds?!"

As if recovering from the momentary distraction, the Goddess returned her attention to the cultivators. Reaching to pin Jin Ling to a tree.

Nie Huaisang, "Does that arm on the Goddess look off to anyone else?"

Jiang Cheng, "It kind of looks like that evil arm."

A black blur smashes into the arm causing it to release Jin Ling. A heavy punch spun the Goddess's head backwards. Spinning as he launched himself at the statue, Wen Qionglin impacted and pierced the Goddess' torso causing it to shatter.

As it tried to escape, the arm was pinned down and held in place by the fierce corpse until Lan Sizhui trapped it into a qiankun pouch.

Wei Wuxian paused his playing to collect his thoughts,

First the forbidden ritual, then the sinister arm, and now Wen Ning. Someone isn't about to let me rest in peace it seems.

Once again, Nie Mingjue notes the subtle glances his brother's way. Now he's sure that his brother had something to do with Wei Wuxian's Resurrection and what was happening on the cloth then.

In his distraction, the cultivators have circled the fierce corpse.

"Damn it. I have to get him out of here." He berated himself and picked up his flute once more. The tune came out sharp and intense as the command "Leave, Hide" was conveyed.

As the cultivators attacked, Wen Qionglin became more fierce due to the intensity and urgency in the notes. In one swift movement, he had Lan Jingyi by the throat and lifted him off the ground.

Lan Jingyi, "That was the scariest moment of my life!"

Wen Qionglin inclined his head in apology, "I'm sorry for that Jingyi."

Lan Jingyi just waved it away and laughed. "It's alright. Now I have a cool story to tell about the time I faced the Ghost General and lived!"

Shaking his head, Wen Qionglin patted his head fondly.

Wei Wuxian, "My fluting got too fierce and stirred him up. I need to calm him down." Calling on an old memory, Wei Wuxian began to play a different melody.

The viewers were thrown into a dark damp cave. Seated against the wall was a feverish and badly injured Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji is passing him energy to help lessen his condition.

Lan Xichen watched in shock as he sees an injured Lan Wangji worrying over his beloved.

Wei Wuxian, "This happened a little after the archery competition that you were attending when brought here. I took first place, followed by Lan Xichen, then Lan Zhan though he left half way through because I had pulled his forehead ribbon, and Jin Zixuan took 4th. The Wens did not even place in top 10. Wen Rouhan was livid so declared all clans need to send their heirs for indoctrination."

Wei Wuxian, "I'm sick. I'm feverish, Brother Wangji, can't you say something nice to make poor, little me feel better?"

When no reply came, Wei WuXian pouted, "You don't have anything nice to say? Fine, I should've known. Then, if you don't want to talk, can you sing? How about you sing a song?"

To his surprise, Lan Wangji began to hum a song.

Closing his eyes and spreading out on the ground, Wei Wuxian listened. "It sounds nice. What's its name?"

Lan WangJi's voice came out mumbled so Wei WuXian opened his eyes, "What was it called again?"

The image of Lan Wangji became blurred as Wei Wuxian lost consciouness.

Lan Zhan squeezed Wei Ying's hand to get his attention. When the boy turned to him, he said ,"WangXian. The song is called WangXian."

Wei Ying's eyes opened wide in shock before he broke out in laughter. "Ah Lan Zhan! You fuddy duddy. That's a great name. I like it!"

At the bottom of the valley, the sounds of a flute breaks through the silence of the surrounding nature. Disciples and rogue cultivators are fleeing from the top of the mountain.

A melody carries in the wind to Lan Wangji and he freezes. *This song... only I and...* Golden eyes snap to the top of the mountain where the song was coming from.

Lan Wangji is definitely not running. Nope. No way. Not running. Lans do not run. Hanguang-Jun never runs. He will take punishment later he tells himself. All he cares about right now is...

He's back! Wei Ying...

Mouths hang open as they watch the ever stoic and rule abiding Second Jade... run up the mountain.

Hua Cheng raised an eyebrow. Maybe not so cold afterall.

With the song having calmed Wen Qionglin, Wei Wuxian began to walk backwards. One step backwards, one step follows forward.

Wei Wuxian bumps into a hard chest. His wrist is caught in a bruising grip. Golden eyes meet Grey.

Zidian whips across the cloth.

Both Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying flinches instinctively, drawing concerned eyes their way.

A strum on the guqin and a burst of energy blocked the hit.

Several gasped at the display of power. Never having seen two first class spiritual tools battle before.

Lan Sizhui, "Zidian steals souls. But can also force the soul out those possessed."

Lan Jingyi, "Does Sect Leader Jiang suspect Young Master Mo's body is being possessed?

"Great. So you're back." a venonous voice sounded out.

Jiang Cheng, "I still blamed you for A-Jie's death even after 13 years?"

Jiang Wanyin, "There were several reasons that I falsely believed because the idiot wouldn't talk to me about it."

Another slash of Zidian is once again blocked by Hanguang-Jun.

Jiang Cheng shouted, "Lan Wangji, are you trying to stand in my way?"

Taking this distraction to make an escape, Wei Wuxian bolted towards Lil' Apple. Out of Lan Wangji's protective range.

Jiang Yanli, "Be careful, A-Xian!"

Wen Qing, "You idiot..."

The lash sent him skidding across the ground, Lil' Apple finally stopping his tumble.

Many flinched and several let out commiserating winches.

Slowly pulling himself up from the ground and back flaring up in pain, Wei Wuxian snapped, "So what? Because you're a clan leader you can beat who ever you want?"

Looking up, he was met with two pairs of surprised eyes. One purple and one gold.

Madam Yu, "What is this ritual that even Zidian can't expel you from the body?!?!?"

Jiang Wanyin, "Why it didn't work? Impossible... Take off your mask!"

Realizing he was still wearing a mask, Wei Wuxian quicly shook his head. "No!I will not take it off! I'll shock you to death with my beauty!"

Chuckles and eye rolls broke through the tense atmosphere.

Zidian flares again and prepares to fly when Lan Jingyi cut in. "Sect Leader Jiang, please stop. That's Zidian! If it didn't work the first time, it wouldn't the second."

At Wei Wuxian's nod, agreeing with the young Lan, Jiang Wanyin grew agitated, "Just who in the world are you?!?!?"

I was forced into this body. I didn't steal it. Of course, you can't whip my soul out of this body.

Madam Yu, "Of course it would be Wei Wuxian who does the impossible like being willingly offered a body,"

Jiang Fengmian, "My lady. A-Xian had no choice in this."

Madam Yu scoffed at the man and turned her attention back to her friend. "Rushi? Are you ok?"

Madam Jin, looking sadly at her son, "Just how many more awful things will we have to watch Lanling Jin do? I'm afraid of what's to come, Ziyuan. Something has to change."

Taking a steadying breath, Madam Jin turns to her friend for many years, "Yu Ziyuan, for our children we must make changes. I must handle the pig that is my husband for my son's well-being. And you... you have to let go of the hurt that you caused with your two hands and make amends."

Madam Yu scoffs at the reprimand. "I have caused no such thing. That brat is constant proof that my children and I are never enough. Why must I meekly allow him to bring another woman's child into our home and adopt him as his own. What of my feelings? What face do I have left?"

GIving her friend a sad smile, Madam Jin shook her head. "Did you forget who the boy's real father is? Wei Changze was Jiang Fengmian's Right Hand. You may have forgotten their brotherly bond but I have not. If not for his status as a servant of Yunmeng Jiang, Wei Changze and Jiang Fengmian would have sworn brotherhood.

We have been sworn sisters for so long now. Tell me, if A-Xuan was in Wei Wuxian's position, would you search for him and bring him to your home? Because I can tell you now, I would go to the ends of the earth to search for your children and bring them home."

Yu Ziyuan scoffed, "There is a difference in those situations , Rushi. Your husband is not in love with me like Fengmian was in love with her."

Liu Rushi gave her friend a hard stare."If you still believe that Jiang Fengmian loved Cangse Sanren, then you're a bigger idiot than I thought."

Jiang Wanyin, "LAN WANGJI! Why are you trying to protect a lunatic who practices the dark arts?"

Unimpressed, Lan Wangji replied, "He used dark arts but for the right reasons. I can't stand aside and let others bully him."

Lan Jingyi, "He's saved us many times. He just saved Jin Ling!"

I need to get rid of them both... **Wei Wuxian looked between Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji before a smile broke on this face.**

Jiang Cheng, "Oh no..."

Jiang Yanlie giggled into her sleeve, "A-Cheng's going to be very mad."

With a pout on his face, Wei Wuxian began in a childish voice, "Sect Leader Jiang, It's not fair of you to keep bothering me like this. I don't flirt with everything that moves. Like you, you're not my type."

With an eyebrow raised, Jiang Wanyin took the bait, "Oh... then what is your type?"

"HANGUANG-JUN OF COURSE!", shouts Wei Wuxian. laughter broke out as Wei Ying flushed red and hid his face in Lan Zhan's shoulder.

Wei Wuxian pulled a lock of hair onto his lip while shyly saying, "Hanguang-Jun is definately my type... I like him very much!" ***Are you disgusted? Let me go, hurry!***

Jiang Wanyin, "YOU!"

After a few seconds on stroking his fingers on his guqin, Lan Wangji announced, "Mark your words."

"I will be taking this person back to my home."

".....HUHHHHH?!?!?!?!?!" echoed through the valley.

Cackling like a madman, Wei Wuxian doubled over, holding his belly. "Definately did NOT see that coming!"

Lan Jingyi, Lan Sizhui, and Jin Ling were confused. How did they read the situation so wrong?

Lan Jingyi, "Wait... so you weren't serious when you said you liked Hanguang-Jun?"

Jin Ling, "Yea! I thought you two got together then!"

Wei Wuxian, "Ah I was young and stupid! And didn't know any better."

"You were 21 mentally..." came the deadpanned reply.

Wei Wuxian, "It doesn't matter. I'm married to the most beautiful man and my zhiji, that's all I care about!"

Lan Wangji, "Wei Ying is the most beautiful."

Lan Zhan, "Mn."

"LAN ZHANNNNNNN!"

Earlier

The three immortals remain bent over the scroll as refreshments are brought in. Curiosity won over as they try to analyze the array.

"The elements here are intended to send the target and a several others to a fixed point on the target's lifeline. While this section notates traveling through time, this corner notates short term confinement. The center focuses on memory and perceptions of souls." Baoshan Sanren recited.

Xie Lian continued to study the array. There is something they're missing. "Then the intention is to send A-Ying and others to the past. Why would they need souls' memories then?"

Hua Cheng, "If the goal was to return them to the past to change events then the memories can give them missing information."

Baoshan Sanren, "Then there shouldn't be a confinement element in the array. That would trap them in a space in the past."

Xie Lian combed through the array slowly in case anything was missed. His intuition telling him something was odd about the array. "There's an additional stroke to the time travel element."

The Cloud Recesses comes into view. Its picturesque calmness is suddenly shattered by a loud wail at the gate.

Lan Qiren pinched the bridge of his nose. This was foreshadowing. The peace and quiet of the Cloud Recesses is about to be shattered.

Several people flinched as the wail got louder.

"I'm not going in! I'm not! No!" Wei Wuxian has his arms around Lil' Apple as Lan Jingyi is trying to pull him in through the gates.

Lam Jingyi, "Why are you crying? Did you say you liked Hanguang-Jun? He brought you here so shouldn'tyou be happy?"

Wei Wuxian holds on tighter and screans louder. "I also like my Lil Apple but you don't see me living in a donkey hut know do you?"

Lan Jingyi, "What are you going on about? You need to be quiet! The rules are all written on that wall. Quiet down or you'll come to regret it!"

Wei Wuxian looked at the wall. "It's been twenty years... and there many new rules! I hated this place the first time I was here!"

"Woah! How many rules are there now?!?!" Asked a flabbergasted Wei Ying.

Wei Wuxian, "4,579."

"WHAT?!?!?!?!"

Wei Ying, "How do you survive there!?!?!?"

"Lan Zhan lets me get away with plenty. That and he takes care of my punishments *personally*." Wei Wuxian answered with a wink.

Lan Sizhui, "Young Master Mo, Hanguang-jun is doing this for your own sake. Sect Leader Jiang wouldn't let you go otherwise."

"Don't bother with him. Let him cry. When he's done, drag him in." came Lan Wangji's command.

Confused, the two disciples bowed, "Yes."

Taking the opportunity, Wei Wuxian jumps on top of Lil' Apple to escape. "Let's go!"

The donkey moved at the command, however, it starts towards the entrance of the Cloud Recesses where Lan Wangji was slowly ascending the steps.

"What are you doing? Not that way!"

His pleas get ignored as the donkey continues forward.

"Stop, stop!"

Lan Wangji turns sideways and viewers can see he is holding an apple in his hand.

Laughter rang out at how easily defeated Wei Wuxian was by Hanguang-Jun. Just by simply bribing the donkey, he got Wei Wuxian through the gates.

"Lil' Apple! You traitor!"

Full Moons Are For Sword Fights

Chapter Summary

Sword fights and love at first sight

It's not Jin Guangshan this time causing trouble this time

Chapter Notes

I LIVE!!

This chapter feels MEH to me but I am stepping away from it before I make more of a mess out of it lol.

The one-shot-that-turned-out-to-not-be-a-one-shot for the 1K Kudos is here: https://archiveofourown.org/works/31462583/chapters/77824130

I will be expanding on it soon!

Looking at the array, Hua Cheng realized what this opportunity presented. What they can finally do to help A-Ying.

Sitting up, he asks, "If this array is meant to do what we think, then... couldn't we build on this and make sure that A-Ying gets the life he deserves with all the loved ones he's lost? The ground work is already there."

Baoshan Sanren and Xie Lian exchange glances before looking back to Hua Cheng with smiles on their faces. "For A-Ying." they vowed.

"For A-Ying."

Lan Jingyi has a grip on Wei Wuxian's arm as they walked through the Cloud Recesses. Lil' Apple safely ensconced in the back hills. Making their way up from the entrance, the group is met with Lan Xichen as he is preparing to leave.

Lan Wangji, "Brother."

Here's my chance to get kicked out! **With a bright smile, Wei Wuxian moves to speak with the Lan Sect Leader.**

His lips sealed shut.

Jiang Cheng, Nie Huaisang, and Jin Zixuan chuckles at Wei Wuxian's offended look.

Jiang Cheng laughs, "You've become predictable to Hanguang-Jun."

Hua Cheng, "I'm surprised he waited until now to silence him. Lan Wangji, you should teach me that trick."

Chuckling awkwardly, Xie Lian pulled his husband's sleeve, "San Lang, that's a technique that only inner Lan clan members can use. He can't teach it to us."

Crossing arms across his chest, Hua Cheng eyes the Lans who are now studiously trying to avoid his eyes.

Turning to Lan Wangji to express his displeasure at being silenced, Wei Wuxian caught a flash of smugness in his eyes before he turned his head and bowed to his brother.

Lan Wangji, "Are you going to visit Lianfang-Zun again?"

Lan Zhan, "Lianfang-zun?"

Lan Xichen, "I do not recall anyone with that title..."

Lan XiChen nodded, "A-Yao wanted to go over last minute issues for the Discussion Conference at Carp Tower."

A-Yao? Lan Xichen mouths to himself as Uncle turns to look at him.

Head Shaker explains, "Lianfang-zun was Jin Guangyao's title after he became the Jin Sect Leader. His biggest believer and supporter was Zewu-jun."

There was definitely bitterness and hatred in his tone, Lan Xichen noted. It seems Meng Yao may be more involved in the future tragedies than Lan Xichen wanted to believe. And he somehow allowed it.

Lan XiChen studied his brother's guest as he added, "Uncle and the elders are examining what you brought back from Mo Village."

Lan Wangji, "Mn."

Smiling, Lan Xichen gently reprimanded his brother, "It's not often that you bring a guest home in such good spirits. You must remember to treat them with courtesy."

Good spirits? Everyone thought as they tried to find any hint of it on the man's face.

Jin Zixuan whispers to Jin Ling, ".... how can you tell?"

Jin Ling, "I don't know but Zewu-jun, Da-jiu, and Lan Sizhui are the only ones who can read his expressions."

Wei wuxian felt his lips release from the silence spell and promptly stuck out his tongue at Lan Wangji. Lan Xichen laughed before excusing himself.

"Drag him inside."

Even Lan Qiren cracked a smile as Wei Wuxian's triumphant smile turned into a whine.

Jiang Yanli, "Why don't we take a break here?" She looks to the table up front where the food previously showed up. "Perhaps some snacks and tea?"

Once again, food and tea appears on the table.

Wei Wuxian, "Well... at least who ever is behind this isn't starving us."

Xie Lian, "A-Ying, why don't we take a look at the array while we're taking a break?"

Hua Cheng unrolls the scroll over a seat while everyone crowds around. "We've concluded that this array was meant to send A-Ying and those closest to him back to the past. This section notates a confinement element. We were not sure what it meant but it turns out to be confinement in this hall."

Xia Lian, "This extra stroke in the time travel element may or may not be intentional. We originally thought it meant the array would only be active for a few seconds or minutes at best."

Wei Wuxian, "I'm willing to bet that outside of this array time has been slowed down in our original timelines."

Wei Ying, "That's odd. This looks like the array I saw before coming to the archery field. How could it be both in your time and mine? Unless..."

Lan Zhan, "Someone in the past has knowledge of this array."

Wei Wuxian, "If they've already figured out how time travel to the past, why not change events themselves instead of doing all of this?"

Lan Wangji points to another section on the array, "Not enough spiritual energy."

"That's a teleportation sigil used by Su She." Wei Wuxian informs. The man was still causing trouble after his death.

Lan Jingyi, "This array would take massive amounts of energy from the caster as well as the target of the array, which is Senior Wei. But you seem just fine."

Lan Zhan, "Wei Ying. Spiritual energy was almost depleted when we arrived."

Wei Wuxian, "But why choose me as the target? There are plenty of other cultivators with more than enough spiritual energy."

Xie Lian, "Perhaps because you played a major part in past events? Let's revisit this later. I believe everyone else is ready to continue with the viewing."

Lan Jingyi's grip returned on Wei Wuxian's arm as Lan Sizhui grabbed his other arm. Curious eyes followed them as they walked through the main courtyard.

Lan Jingyi, "Hanguang-Jun, where should we drag him?

"The jingshi."

Lan Zhan and Lan Xichen startled.

Lan Qiren screamed, "WHAT?!?!?! LAN WANGJI! HAVE YOU NO SHAME?!?"

Lan Wangji, "Causing noise is forbidden. Please calm, Uncle."

Turning red, Lan Qiren shoots back, "Promiscuity is prohibited!"

"Do not make assumptions about others." replies Lan Wangji as he stares at the white cloth.

Wei Wuxian cuts in before things escalates, "Do not argue with your family, for it does not matter who wins. Harmony is the value."

All eyes turn to Wei Wuxian in shock. Were they hearing things? Lan Qiren openly gaped at Wei Wuxian, struck speechless. Did Wei Wuxian actually state Cloud Recesses rules to end an argument between the two Lans?

Breaking the silence, Wei Ying asks, "uhmmm, what is the Jingshi?"

Wei Wuxian smirked as he replies, "Our private home in the Cloud Recesses. "

Lan Zhan and Wei Ying stare at their future selves with wide eyes. Just how much did they change over the years?

Xie Lian had a firm grip on his husband's arm.

Wei Wuxian found himself shoved into the Jingshi and the doors shut behind him. The familiar scent of sandalwood brought back memories of his short studies here.

Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian are crossing the stone bridge from an earlier scene. Nie Huaisang turns from speaking to his fellow disciples and calls out to them.

Nie Huaisang, "Brother Jiang! Wuxian! Looking at you, you must think Gusu is boring!"

Wei Wuxian, "I wouldn't say that! It's too early!"

A Nie disciple scoffs, "We start at 5 am here, it can't be that bad!"

Curious about their schedules at home, Nie Huaisang asks, "When did you two get up?"

"Him? He's never up before 9 am and doesn't sleep until 1 am. Instead of practicing his sword forms, he goes to hunt pheasants. Always fooling around instead of training." scoffs Jiang Wanyin.

Lan Sizhui laughs as he recounts, "Senior Wei still doesn't wake up before 9am. Hanguang-Jun has to wake him up for his classes or he'll be late."

Xie Lian and Hua Cheng exchange amused glances. Memories of a toddler A-Ying falling asleep into his morning porridge made them chuckle.

Lan Wangji, "Wei Ying looses track of time. Often forgets to sleep if not told to sleep."

Lan Jingyi remembers the last time he had to wake up Senior Wei. They were out on a night hunt so they stayed at an inn. It took him and Sizhui almost two hours to wake Senior Wei up. And even then the man was falling asleep during breakfast.

Lan Qiren shakes his head and scolds, "Frivolous."

Scene shifts to Lotus Pier at night. A figure in black jumps from the rooftops and lands outside the gates where it disappears into the woods. The viewers are brought to a clearing in the woods where the figure in black looks to be practicing sword forms.

As the clouds moves in the sky, the moonlight beams down to reveal the figure to be Wei Wuxian. Drenched in sweat. Serious expression so out of place on his face. A large contrast to how he is in front of everyone.

Wei Ying bows his head at the shocked stares he's getting from those who know him. No one was supposed to know how much he actually trained. Goofing off during training was his way of not overshadowing Jiang Cheng but no matter what he did, short of stopping training all together, would be enough. Madam Yu will always pit them against each other and assign bruising training routines to him to try and break him.

I need to get stronger for Jiang Cheng. He'll need me when he takes over the sect. There can't be any weaknesses. Yunmeng Jiang can't appear weak to the others.

He strikes against a tree causing a sharp piece to cut his forearm yet he continues to train until the sky lightens and the first signs of dawn approaches. Uncaring of the blood dripping to the ground.

The Jiangs are taken aback. For years they thought Wei Wuxian never put much work into his training but still gained the skill with ease. Jiang Cheng resented him for how easy things came to his shixiong. Madam Yu resented that the boy overshadowed her son without so much as training properly. But that wasn't the case was it?

Jiang Wanyin chances a look at his Da-Shixiong. All that training to build up his core to be strong enough to protect Yunmeng Jiang. The same core that sits in his dantian right now.

Confused, Nie Mingjue asks, "I don't understand. Why do you not train with the others on the training -" He cuts himself off as he realizes why. Madam Yu has returned to glaring daggers at Wei Ying. Like she blamed all the world's misfortunes on him.

With a glare if his own directed to Madam Yu, he addresses Wei Ying, "Young Master Wei. If you ever find yourself in need of assistance, Qinghe Nie will gladly lend a hand." That earned him a happy smile from his little brother and a shocked look from Wei Ying.

Wei Ying bowed, "Thank you, Sect Leader Nie."

The scene returns to the Cloud Recesses as if Wei Wuxian had cut off the memory. Wei Wuxian exclaims, "Hey! No one can beat me at hunting pheasants!"

Nie Huaisang has stars in his eyes,, "I want to go study at Yunmeng next year! No one can stop me!"

Nie Zonghui laughs, "Huaisang, no one's stopping you. Your brother will just break your legs."

Nie Mingjue snorts. "You couldn't pass the lectures in Cloud Recesses and you still want to goof off?"

Nie Huaisang, "Da-ge! Think of it as alliance strength building! They can even come to the Unclean Realm to train for a year!"

Nie Mingjue merely looked at his brother with one eyebrow quirked to show he wasn't buying it.

Wanting a closer look at the incense burner, Wei Wuxian shifted to get closer. As his foot landed on a pane of wood, he felt it shift slightly. Curious, he pulled up the loose board.

Seven jars of Emperor's Smile were packed into the small space. Breaking out in laughter, Wei Wuxian threw himself on the floor. *This fuddy duddy has changed! He's hiding wine now!*

Opening up a jar, Wei Wuxian gulped it down. Lan Wangji still owed him a jar.

Lan Qiren grew even more red. "LAN WANGJI!"

Wen Qing, who had moved closer to Wei Wuxian as the viewing progressed, whispered, "Do I need my needles?"

Wei Wuxian studied his Uncle in Law before replying, "You might need to be ready to. I don't think he'll react well to what's coming..."

Jiang Yanli, having heard the conversation, walked over to sit beside the Wen siblings. Smiling she inquired, "Young Lady Wen, could you teach me how to use the needles? I feel it will be most helpful at home."

With a raised eyebrow, Wen Qing nodded.

Nie Mingjue and everyone's eyes practically bulged out of their heads. Nie Mingjue looked to Lan Xichen. The man looked contemplative as if trying to puzzle out why.

A young Lan Wangji looks out at the full moon from one of the watch towers. The new guest disciples arrived just today and Cloud Recesses was quite loud. He needed the tranquility of night to calm his nerves.

An arm is thrown over the wall as messy, untamed locks peek over the wall. Seeing no one around down below, the boy pulls himself up to straddle the wall. Smiling triumphantly to himself before a deep voice spoke.

"No entry after dark. Get Out."

Nie Huaisang gasped, "OOOOOHHHHH this was the night you two met! You told us about it but now we get to experience it ourselves!"

Jiang Cheng could only shake his head for the chaos that was to come.

Startled, Wei Wuxian turned to the sound of the voice and his eyes fell upon the Lan under the moonlight. *He's beautiful.*

Two jars clink into view catching Lan Wangji's attention. Thinking the Lan boy was interested in the alcohol, Wei Wuxian smiled brightly.

"Emperor's Smile! I'll give you a jar if you pretend to not see me!"

Lan Wangji, face still blank, was taken aback by the bright smile. His heart gave a flip and its beating slowed. *Beautiful.*

Female cultivators cooed at how cute the two were and sighed "Awww love at first sight!" causing the younger couple to blush brightly.

Snapping out of the shock, Lan Wangji fell back on the rules, "Alcohol is forbidden. Bribing a patrol is forbidden. That is three offenses. Come accept your punishment. "

Wei Wuxian rolls his eyes at the statement. "What isn't forbidden here?"

Wei Wuxian had his head on Lan Wangji's shoulder while Wei Ying's were on Lan Zhan's.

Annoyance tugged at Hua Cheng and he yelled, "A-YING!"

Jolting from their places, both turn to look at Hua Cheng. Wei Ying's wide eyes turned to Wei Wuxian in question. Shaking his head to indicate he didn't know why, Wei Wuxian asked, "Yes, Hua-gege?"

Xie Lang chuckled and quickly pat Hua Cheng's arm, "Ah, it's nothing, A-Ying. San Lang was just surprised that's all! Go back to the viewing!"

Wei Wuxian, "Alright, alright. I won't go in. I'll stay outside and sit here to drink. This won't count, right?"

Unruly. **Lan Wangji unsheathes his sword and lunges forward to knock the wine from Wei Wuxian's hands. Wei Wuxian dodges with agility and sure feet. Chest to chest as Wei Wuxian slips past the next strike.**

Gold meets silver. Black and white robes dancing against the moonlight in tune with one another. The cloth focuses on Lan Wangji's sword as it is met with Wei Wuxian's still sheathed sword.

"Whoa! This is the best day of my life!" shouts Lan Jingyi. He doesn't care if he has to copy more rules. This was a once in a lifetime chance to see his two seniors sparring. All four are on their feet, entranced with the sparring.

Ouyang Zizhen, "How come we've never seen you spar with your sword before Senior Wei? You're amazing!"

At that, the past elders sharply look at Wei Wuxian. Who was averting his eyes and valiantly trying to not meet anyone's eyes. Lan Qiren and Jiang Fengmian's eyes narrowed.

Lan Jingyi, "Yea! You didn't even unsheath your sword to spar with Hanguang-Jun!"

Laughing at their expressions, Wei Ying laughs, "Lan Zhan and I are equal in skill! He definitely lives up to his title for sure! I'll spar with you guys later if you want!"

Excited exclamations came from the four boys as they nodded their heads. This was simply amazing!

Back in the Jingshi, Wei Wuxian finishes another jar. Finding there was no place to put the empty jars, he filled both with water and put them back. ***Time to find a way to escape!***

Jiang Cheng and Jiang Wanyin both touched their left hand to their foreheads and shook their heads. *Of course he would...*

Leaving the Jingshi, he walks towards the Lanshi in hopes of finding a weak spot in the barrier array. Walking past the Lanshi, a sense of nostalgia hits Wei Wuxian as he looks into the empty classroom.

Slowly, disciples of the past begin to appear and become solid. Lan Qiren can be heard in the background reciting the sect rules yet again.

How can he listen to something so boring? **Wei Wuxian wonders as he leans over his desk and props his cheek on top of his first. Staring at Lan Wangji as the lesson continues on.**

Lan Qiren, "I'm reciting the rules one by one because no one reads them. After this, let's see who will break the rules."

Wei Wuxian, *Is he talking about me?*

Seeing Wei Wuxian's sitting position, Lan Qiren puts down his scroll. " Very well. Since someone is still not paying attention, let's try something else. Wei Ying!"

Wei Wuxian, "Here!"

"Who was the first one to prosper their family at the cost of their Clan?"

"Wen Mao from Wen Clan."

"What did the ancestors of Nie Clan do?"

"Butcher!"

"The heraldry of the Jin clan is a white peony. Which type of white peony?"

"Sparks Amidst Snow."

Cultivators watched the exchange with their mouths hanging open. The rapid fire answers from Wei Wuxian was correct and he did not falter.

"Are imp, demons, ghosts, and monsters the same things?"

"No."

"How do spirits, demons, ghosts and monsters differ?"

"Spirits come from living plants and animals. Demons come from humans. Ghosts are from the dead. Monsters are from dead plants and animals."

Lan Sizhui frowned as the questioning continued in this fashion.

Lan Jingyi, "Is it just me or does it seem like Grandmaster Lan is purposefully picking on Senior Wei?"

Ouyang Zizhen, "Yea... he hasn't even asked anyone else in the class." Jin Ling nodded in agreement.

Lan Qiren strokes his beard as he turns away from Wei Wuxian. "As Head Disciple of Yunmeng Jiang, you should already be very familiar with these questions and know them by heart. There is nothing to be proud of in answering them correctly."

The hall falls silent at Lan Qiren's words. The young disciples seethe at the blatant disrepect to their Senior.

Xie Lian and Hua Cheng's expression darkens but Xie Lian has a firm grip on Hua Cheng. They will be having a word with the man when this is over.

Lan Xichen frowns at Uncle's conduct. He's heard of the many spats that Wei Wuxian supposedly had with Uncle through his uncle's rants. But if his uncle's behavior was along the

lines of what they just saw... could he really blame Wei Wuxian's behavior?

"There is an executioner who has parents, awife, and children. He has beheaded over 100 people. After his death, no one buried him. Resentment built up over time, his ghost haunts the streets and kill. What should we do?"

Wei Wuxian takes longer to answer this question. It seemed that he was trying to think of the answer. "Well..."

Lan Qiren's eyes roam the room. Disciples either look away or are looking through their texts. "Don't open your books! Think of the answers by yourselves!"

When still no answer comes, Lan Qiren calls on Lan Wangji to asnwer the question. Wei Wuxian pulls out a fresh sheet of parchment and starts drawing.

Lan Wangji eyes the drawing as he recites the answer, "First, liberate; second, suppress; third, eliminate. Talk to him first. Remind him of his family and calm him down. Grant his unfulfilled wish, clear his unfinished business in the world. Forcefully make him leave if that doesn't work. If he refuses to repent, destroy him. No errors should be allowed."

Proudly stroking his beard, Lan Qiren continues to lecture, "Not one word is wrong. No matter the person or the cultivation level, one needs to be as firm as him. If one becomes complacent and proud just because a few simple mountain beings were defeated in their home and they hold some empty reputations, disgrace will be brought upon themselves, sooner or later."

Lan Qiren is thrown back against a wall. Hua Cheng's hand wrapped around his throat. "LAN QIREN! Is this the famed Righteousness of the Lan Sect? Do you feel powerful when you insult your students? A sense of accomplishment for tearing down the youths that look up to you? What is the point in your rules if you feel yourself above following them? Should I just reduce the Cloud Recesses to dust to remind you how powerless you really are? Who you insulted?"

Choking noises comes from his throat as Lan Qiren struggles for air.

Lan Xichen could only look at his uncle in shock. He needs to do something before disaster comes to the Cloud Recesses. He looks over to his brother. Wangji's entire body screams rage.

The cultivators are forced from their seats to the ground as a wave of spiritual power hits them. The Heavenly God and The Ghost King are pissed and no one is safe.

Wrei Wuxian quickly runs to Hua Cheng's side to calm him down. "Hua-gege! Please release Grandmaster Lan. We can talk this through. Please. Release him, hmm?"

Running to Xie Lian, Wei Wuxian tries again. "Xie-gege! Xie-gege! Please! Get Hua-gege to release Grandmaster Lan! We can talk about matters afterwards. Just get him to release him! Please!"

Calming down from his anger, Xie Lian eyes Grandmaster Lan and Lan Xichen before he calls out to Hua Cheng. "San Lang, please release Grandmaster Lan so he can explain himself. It won't do for us to kill A-Ying's future uncle in law."

The oppressive spiritual energy releases as Hua Cheng lets go of Lan Qiren's throat and the man collapses to the ground. Scoffing at the sorry state of the man, Hua Cheng returned to sit at Xie Lian's side. "Gege, that man deserves no less than a few broken bones."

Xie Lian smiles tensely, "I understand San Lang. However, A-Ying has asked us to refrain from killing his future in law."

Crossing his arms like a petulant child, Hua Cheng scoffs. "Fine."

Ah... so he wanted to use Lan Wangji to knock me down a notch. Well then, I can't be blamed for what is to come.

Wei Wuxian, "I have doubts. Find out his unfulfilled wish, resolve his unfinished business? But what do we do if his unfinished business is revenge?"

Lan Wangji, "Use force when necessary. Destroy him if needed."

Wei Wuxian, "What a waste! It's not that I don't know the answer, I was thinking of a fourth option."

Lan Qiren, "I've never heard of a fourth option."

Holding up the doodle he was drawing while Lan Wangji recited his answer, Wei Wuxian explains, "The executioner died a violent death and is resentful. He's beheaded so many, why don't we dig up the graves of his victims and gather their spirits to fight with him?"

Madam Yu, "WEI WUXIAN!!!! IS THAT SOMETHING YOU THINK CAN DISCUSS FREELY? ESPECIALLY IN PUBLIC IN FRONT OF SO MANY OTHER CLANS?!!?!?"

Jiang Fengmian, "My lady... please calm down. A-Xian has a curious mind and this was a classroom setting. He should have been able to ask his question and gotten calm a reply in turn."

Scoffing at the man, Yu Ziyuan looked to Wei Ying. "To bring up such topics in front of another clan's elder. He is showing a lack of respect for Yunmeng Jiang. But of course you will allow it, it is Wei Ying after all..."

Wei Ying ducks his head to keep Madam Yu's attention away from him so as to not make the situation worse.

Angry, Lan Qiren throws a scroll at Wei Wuxian and shouts, "The core of exorcising demons and ghosts is to liberate! You want to use evil to fight evil? That's goes against nature and morality!"

The rest of the disciples watch on in horror as the situation escalates. Jiang Wanyin is getting more angry at his Da-Shixiong's behavior. There's no face left for Yunmeng Jiang.

Madam Yu, "And yet you just sit there and allowed him to continue spouting his nonsense! You should have dragged him out of there by the hair if you needed to!"

Several narrowed eyes were directed her way. Madam Jin pulled her sleeve to get her to quiet down.

Dodging the scroll, Wei Wuxian recites, "Spiritual energy is energy; resentful energy is energy as well. Spiritual energy can split mountains and fill oceans. It's available for human use. If so, then why can't we also use resentful energy?"

Throwing another text and face turning more red, Lan Qiren shouts again, "Let me ask you, How do you make the resentful energies listen to you and doesn't harm others? What if you lose control?"

Wei Wuxian dodges the text again only this time it smacks right into Nie Huaisang's face.

Nie Mingjue resists the urge to reach out and grab the text that was hurtling towards his brother.

Wei Wuxian sits down to ponder, "That's a good question."

Finally having had enough of the troublemaker, Lan Qiren raises his voice louder, "If you've got the answer, the cultivation world would never allow you to exist! Get Out!"

With a bow, Wei Wuxian saunters out of the classroom with a smile on his face.

The hall remains deadly quiet as no one is able to form any coherent thoughts.

"Do not disrespect the younger. Do not be haughty and complacent. Do not take advantage of your position to oppress others. Do not insult people. Do not criticize other people. Do not treat others with contempt. Don't be ill-mannered. Don't sow discord. Grandmaster Lan, I hope you will be able to assign yourself punishment. Otherwise, perhaps Zewu-jun would be so kind as to assist you." recites Lan Jingyi in a voice devoid of his usual cheer as he bows to the elder Lans.

Lan Sizhui stands to bow to Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen. Jin Ling and Ouyang Zizhen follows suit. "As elders of Gusu Lan Sect, this disciple hopes that Grandmaster Lan and Sect Leader Lan can formally apologize to both Senior Weis for the insult and disrespect he endured during his stay at the Cloud Recesses."

Jin Ling, "No matter his rule-breaking attitude, Senior Wei does not intentionally insult or bully others. Grandmaster Lan was out of line in his single minded attack on Senior Wei. An apology is due to both versions of Senior Wei."

Let The Punishment Fit The Crime

Chapter Summary

Hua Chengzhu's foot slips

The Lans get a hint of what is to come

Chapter Notes

I may come back and make some minor grammar edits... be warned lol

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I..." Lan Qiren struggled to speak. His throat was sore and his neck bruised.

Wei Wuxian, "Grandmaster Lan. In my timeline, you and I made our peace. I forgave you for your past transgressions against me and you forgave me for mine. So if anyone needs your apologies, it would be your Wei Wuxian."

Wei Ying, " Ah! That's really not necessary..."

Jiang Wanyin, "Shut up and let him apologize."

Summoning some tea to the table, Lan Xichen poured his uncle a cup. As he handed the cup to his uncle, Lan Xichen caught his eye. "Uncle, your behavior was out of line. When you spoke about Young Master Wei's behavior I assumed that his actions stemmed from his youth and arrogance. But it seems I should have questioned it and tried to see for myself."

Lan Xichen turns to bow to Wei Ying as Lan Zhan follows his lead, "Young Master Wei, I humbly apologize for the mistreatment you endured while at the Cloud Recesses. Going forward, I shall endeavor to be more vigilant so that this event does not happen again."

Swallowing down the lump in his throat, Lan Qiren cleared his throat. "While your behavior and theories are alarming, as an elder, I should not have allowed my past grievances with your mother form prejudices against you."

Coughing through the throbbing in his throat, Lan Qiren continued as he bowed to Wei Ying, "As a teacher, I should have been patient and encouraged your curiosity while helping you understand the dangers of the theories you've come up with. For that, I apologize for my behavior and failings as a teacher. I will accept whatever punishment my sect leader will assign me."

Truly feeling awkward now, Wei Ying grimaced and rubbed the back of his neck. He's never been comfortable with receiving genuine praises and gestures from others . "Ah... that's ok Zewu-jun! Grandmaster Lan!" Dropping into a bow of his own, Wei Wuxian apologized, "This disciple apologizes for his misbehavior and for speaking without thinking about the repercussions. Let's... uhmm... let's get back to the viewing ok?"

Having decided that the easiest way to escape is to acquire a pass token, he heads to the Cold Pond.

You have to undress when you go in the Cold Pond so it will be easy to steal one! **Wei Wuxian reasons.** ***I haven't been this way in years!***

Lan Zhan quietly murmurs, "Shameless." Lan Wangji looks over at his younger self and internally smirked. He and Wei Ying have already satisfied that fantasy many times over.

As Wei Wuxian heads to the back hills where the Cold Pond was, he passed a stream. A soft smile blooms on his face as he remembered the times he spent there.

Nie Huaisang, "Oh! That's where we went fishing, wasn't it Brother Wei?"

Wei Ying, "Yep!"

Walking through the back hills, the viewers are shown three disciples by the waterfall. Wei Wuxian had headed to the back hills when he was thrown out of Lan Qiren's class. Even though they moved closer, they couldn't hear what Nie Huaisang was saying.

Jiang Cheng, "Enough. This is getting ridiculous! You can say whatever you want back at home but you can't stray down that path!"

Wei Wuxian, "I'm not stupid enough to try it! I'll stick to the broad path like everyone else. If it was really that easy, someone would have done it already! There's still time before dinner, Brother Nie, let's go play!"

The viewers began to wonder what had caused the boy to stray from the path if he knew that it was dangerous.

Jiang Cheng, "Forget it! Grandmaster Lan ordered you to copy The Book of Discipline three times to reflect on your wrongdoings."

Incredulous, Wei Wuxian shouted, "Three times?!?! I'll fly to up to the heavens after just copying once! No way..." Wei Wuxian walks away with Nie Huaisang as the scene goes dark and shifts to stream in the back hills again.

Those who have studied at the Cloud Recesses made noises of sympathy. The Book of Discipline was a very thick text well over 300 pages of rules and rituals.

"Brother Wei!" The voice of Nie Huaisang floated through the hall as two teen boys dressed in Gusu Lan guest disciple robes materializes in the stream. Their robes are hiked up and tied around their waist as they search for something in the water.

At Nie Huaisang's call, Wei Wuxian straightens up and chides, "You frightened away the fish!"

Nie Mingjue stared at the cloth, mouth agape. His brother is waist deep in water... catching fish???

Jiang Cheng, "Hold on... THAT'S where you disappeared to that day? I was waiting for you all day, you asshole!"

Wei Ying rubs his arm where his brother punched him and pouts. Ok... he deserved that.

Gesturing his apologies, Huaisang returned to searching around. As they continued to root around, Wei Wuxian spots a fish and slowly approached; trying not to scare it away. With quick reflexes, his hands shoot into the water and grabs hold of the fish.

Seeing Wei Wuxian hold the caught fish, Nie Huaisang excitedly shouted, "Give me, give me, give me. Throw it to me! Throw it to me!"

The fish is tossed to Nie Huaisang, only for him to completely miss and drop the fish back in the water. With a pout, Wei Wuxian complained, "Bro Nie, if you can't help that's ok. But I've only just caught a fish for you and you let it escape!"

The cultivators chuckle at the carefree scene. To be young and leisurely.

Disheartened, Nie Huaisang placed his hands on his hips. "We have magic tricks so why should we catch the fish ourselves?"

With a glare, Wei Wuxian crossed his arms and shot back, "That's boring. You agreed to follow me to play all around Gusu. Climbing mountains and wading in rivers are part of that!"

"Does that count as playing around?"

"Sounds like training to me..."

"If that's what training would be like, I'd train more often!"

Nie Mingjue held back a laugh. Wei Wuxian truly does come up with odd schemes. Nie Huaisang hates training and complains when he is told to run laps. Yet here he is... willingly hiking mountain paths and swimming in streams. Both activities train your muscles and gets your heart pumping. Perhaps that can be adapted when they get back home.

Knowing he can't win an argument against Wei Wuxian, Nie Huaisang yielded, "Ok OK! Let's continue."

Both goes back to looking for fish when Wei Wuxian peeks back behind him. Nie Huaisang has his back to him and is bent over looking for fish. With a smirk on his face, Wei Wuxian inched closer to Nie Huaisang.

Jiang Cheng smirked as well. Nie Huaisang is about to get very drenched.

Once close enough, he calls out "There'e so many fish here!". In one smooth move, Wei Wuxian lifts his leg and kicks Nie Huaisang's behind with enough force to topple him into the water.

Nie Huaisang flailed around for a few seconds crying out for help before realizing he was in shallow waters and embarrassingly stood up. "WEI WUXIAN!!!!!"

With a cackle, Wei Wuxian runs off

This time Nie Mingjue really does laugh out loud along with the others.

Nie Mingjue, "Perhaps a year of study in Lotus Pier may not be such a bad idea."

At Nie Huaisang's shocked expression, Nie Mingjue laughs louder.

The viewers are brought back to the back hills as Wei Wuxian sneaks behind a boulder. Since the female disciples do not come to this side of the Cloud Recesses and the Lans were too virtuous to do something as despicable as spying on others bathing, security was a little relaxed. Taking the opportunity that the guard on duty was far away, Wei Wuxian stealthily entered the area.

Lan Xichen watched as he wondered if perhaps they should increase the security around the Cloud Recesses more. They never thought someone would ever do something like peeking at someone bathing but if there were other intentions, such as stealing a token pass, it wouldn't be too hard for it to happen.

A pile of white robes lay neatly stacked upon the white stone paths indicated there was someone already inside. Almost reluctant to mess up the impeccably folded robes, Wei Wuxian stuck his hand in to rummage for the pass. As his eyes roamed to look for anyone coming, it lands on the person in the pond causing Wei Wuxian to freeze.

Back to Wei Wuxian and the viewers, the bather's hair is dripping wet as it cascades down one side of his shoulder. The man has broad shoulders and well toned muscles. What caught Wei Wuxian's attention, however, was the network of intersecting scars on his back.

Discipline Whip

The Lans sit up straighter in dismay. Who was this disciple? What crimes did they commit to be punished this severely. For the whip to be used, the crime had to be grave.

What crime did this person commit to be punished this severely? If it was truly that serious of a crime, death should have been the punishment. **Wei Wuxian thought.**

As Wei Wuxian thought to himself, the bather turned around and his attention was caught again. Although the face of the bather was still hidden, a Qishan Wen brand stood out against his pale white skin.

Wen Qing and Wen Ning pales are they see the brand of the main clan. Were those whips from Qishan Wen?

Outrage rippled through the hall as the cultivators realize where the brand originated from. The Lans were engaged that one of their disciples were harmed in such a way.

Lan Qiren knew war was coming but had held out hope that perhaps Gusu Lan wouldn't be very involved. However, seeing the scars on this disciple, Gusu Lan couldn't have possibly stood aside.

The distraction was enough to give himself away. A flash of white light is all the warning Wei Wuxian gets before the blue glare of a sword flies towards him. The sword slashes the snow before him and its icy cold spiritual blasts at Wei Wuxian.

"BICHEN?!?!?"

Confusion rang out as everyone recognized the blade. Who in the Cultivation world wouldn't recognize the Second Jade's blade.

Does that mean the disciple was Lan Wangji? Heads turn towards Lan Wangji as he wraps his arms around his husband. Unable to believe what they've just seen, Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen turn to Lan Wangji for answers.

Lan Xichen, 'Wangji... those scars..."

Without looking away from his husband, Lan Wangji simply replied, "They are not from Qishan Wen."

Even more confused by his answer, Lan Qiren observes his nephew. There was a stiffness in the way he carried himself as he comforted his husband. Wei Wuxian is very obviously upset and seemed just barely able to hold himself together.

Jin Guangshan's words came back into his mind: *Perhaps Sect Leader Lan and Grandmaster Lan should listen to your elders and have the disobedience whipped from Lan Wangji!* Although afraid of what the answer would be, Lan Qiren asks, "Who inflicted those wounds on you, Wangji?"

"Gusu Lan Sect"

Lan Zhan's world crashes over him as the words leave Lan Wangji's lips. His own sect did this to him. Wei Ying grabs his trembling hands and looks at him with worry in his eyes. He holds onto Wei Ying's hand like it is a lifeline. He uses it to ground himself.

Silence engulfed the hall as the words sink in. None other than Gusu Lan Sect were the perpetrators. Then what could possibly be the reason for it? The ever rule-abiding and incorruptible Second Jade of Lan was punished so severely. But why?

Heart sick, Lan Xichen glances at a shocked Lan Zhan before turning his attention to Lan Wangji. "Why? What could you have possibly done that would cause you to be punished so?!?? Why did Uncle and I allow it?"

Before Lan Wangji could answer, Jin Guangshan begins to laugh. His family looks at him aghast like he's lost his mind. "Looks like your future selves realized your Second Jade was

corrupted by the demon he calls husband and had him whipped to cle-"

Jin Guangshan is lifted into the air and kicked face first into the ground. Hua Cheng stands with his arms crossed and right foot on the back of Jin Guangshan's head smashing it to the floor. At everyone's shocked expressions, he shrugged before walking back to sit down next to Xie Lian, "Foot slipped."

The Jiangs and Jins stay frozen in their seats. No one saw the him move until it was too late. Afraid to anger the Ghost King after that display, everyone holds their tongue and remains silent.

Shaken, Lan Xichen tries again, "Wangji. Will you tell us why you have those scars?"

When Lan Wangji does not reply, he turns to Wei Wuxian and appeals, "Young Master Wei, you must know the reason why so we can prevent it from happening."

Lan Wangji does not give his husband the chance to answer. He stares at his brother and Uncle before he states, "Gusu Lan precepts failed to protect the innocent. Failed to protect Wangji. Xiongzhang and Uncle allowed biases, rumors, lies, and a Jin disease to cloud your judgment. Wangji's punishment was because Wangji injured thirty three elders to protect Wei Ying."

Dismayed, Lan Qiren asked, "You raised your sword against your elders?"

Furious, the Head Shaker slowly stood from his seat, "Your own sect whipped you to that extent? Because you raised your sword against them to protect the man they themselves wronged? On the words of that bastard Jin Guangyao?"

Nie Mingjue, having never seen his brother so angry, tentatively asks, "What does Meng... Jin Guangyao have to do with Wangji's punishment."

Jiang Wanyin sneers at the question, "The better question would be what doesn't have anything to do with Jin Guangyao. Bastard had his hands in everything."

The Head Shaker holds Nie Mingjue's eye before turning to Lan Xichen and stating, "If you want to prevent that from happening, do not take the words of a snake over the words of your brothers. Your disregard for mine and Lan Wangji's words were what led to the massacre of innocents by the hands of the cultivation world. A massacre incited by the Jins to gain more power. If we continue watching, I'm sure everything will become clear."

Jin Zixuan comes to his father's side to help him into a chair as he's still paralyzed. Wen Qing came to check his pulse and assess the damage. "His vitals are stable."

Jin Zixuan, "And his injuries?"

Hua Cheng chose that moment to speak up, "He's a cultivator is he not?" At Jin Zixuan's nod, "Then his golden core will heal him in no time. I barely even nudged him. Maybe next time he'll keep his mouth shut."

Snapping out of his confusion and completely forgetting about the scars, Wei Wuxian made a run for it. "Crap!! It's Lan WangJi!!!"

Dodging the blade, Wei Wuxian made his way out of the Cold Pond only to run into Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui. Taking this chance to once again try and get thrown off the mountain, Wei Wuxian shouts, "I didn't see anything! I'm definitely not here to watch Hanguang-Jun bathing!"

The youths all blushed bright red and looked away from the cloth. Lan Jingyi suddenly remembered this day and paled. "I'm doomed... done for... Hanguang-Jun is going to flay me alive..."

Shocked by the sudden shout, the juniors stuttered, "Hanguang-Jun? Hanguang-Jun is inside?!!?!"

A furious Lan Jingyi grabbed his arm, " YOU....You damned cut-sleeve! Is he someone you can just peep at?!?!?"

Gaining momentum, Wei Wuxian continued, " I didn't see how Hanguang-Jun looks like without his clothes!"

Lan JingYi fumed, "That's like you're saying that three-hundred taels are not buried here! What are you sneaking around here for then? Look at you! Do you have anymore face left?"

Lan Wangji, "Jingyi"

Head bowed, Lan Jingyi turns to Lan Wangji "Yes, Hanguang-Jun."

Lan Wangji, "10 copies."

Covering his face with his hands, Wei Wuxian cried, "Quiet down… Noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses."

Lan Wangji steps out from the Cold Pond properly dressed with his hair still down and sword still unsheathed. The juniors ran to complain to Hanguang-Jun about Wei Wuxian's behavior.

Internally snickering, Wei WuXian thought *This is it! They're definitely going to kick hin out now!* However, Lan WangJi gave him a look and sheathed his sword before dismissing the juniors.

Lan Wangji grabs him the the collar and drags him back to the Jingshi. When Wei Wuxian opens his mouth to shout again, Lan Wangji informs him, "Those who make noise will be silenced."

Wei Ying grimaces at the threat, "Being thrown off the mountain would be better than getting silenced..."

Since when did the Lan Sect tolerate something so shameless as this? No one dares peek at one of the Lan Clan's most distinguished cultivators bathing but is no one really going kick me off the mountain?!

"Never." Lan Qiren says through gritted teeth. "Gusu Lan has never and will never tolerate something like that!"

Wei Wuxian is dragged straight back to the Jingshi and back toward an inner room. He is thrown into the bed with a loud thump. Yelping in pain, Wei Wuxian struggled to pull himself upright and succeeds after a short while.

Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Yanli watches the scene with frowns on their faces.

Jiang Cheng, "LAN WANGJI! WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!"

He is ignored.

Grabbing his husband's arm, Xie Lian whispered to Hua Cheng to calm him down.

Lan Wangji looms over him with his hair down his robes loose from dragging Wei Wuxian back. Due to the loosened robes, Wei Wuxian is able to see the brand peeking out from the side of the robe.

Mind wondering where Lan Wangji could have gotten such a brand, he absent mindedly raised a hand to cover where his own Wen brand would have been on his old body. Lan Wangji's brand was in the same place his would have been.

Nie Huaisang, "Brother Wangji! How *did* you end up with that brand, if it wasn't from the war?"

He's also ignored.

Noticing his hand movement, Lan Wangji followed his gaze to the brand on his own chest. With one tug, he covers the brand once again as the evening bell begins to toll.

Lan Wangji, "You will be sleeping here."

Without waiting for Wei Wuxian to reply, he turned to another part of the Jingshi. Wei WuXian was once again alone, sprawled on the bed, and feeling confused.

Hua Cheng settles a little but his eyes are still narrowed at Lan Wangji. Imagining giving him to the ghosts in Ghost City to play with.

Even though he was beginning to suspect that Lan Wangji may have figured out who he was, he still convinced himself that it can't be that. He couldn't possibly recognize him because of a terribly played song.

After a while of trying to figure out why Lan Wangji is all of a sudden more tolerant of his antics, Wei Wuxian jumped out of bed and sneaked into the other chamber.

Jiang Wanyin is once again pinching the bridge of his nose, "Why can't you just stay still where you're put?"

Wei Wuxian laughs at his brother, "When have I ever stayed where I'm told?"

Not giving up hope on stealing the passage token, Wei Wuxian stands by Lan Wangji's bed. He seemed to be asleep in the proper Lan position with his eyes closed. Slowly extending his hand to search for the pass before his wrist is captured in a strong grip.

Before he can change his mind, Wei Wuxian throws himself onto the bed. Using his knowledge that Lan Wangji hated physical contact, he hoped to get kicked out for doing this. If it was tolerated, then Lan Wangji was possessed and needed cleansing!

Female cultivators blush and turn away from the cloth. Madam Yu's eyebrows twitch as she fights the urge to scream at Wei Wuxian. The boy is already embarrassing the sect, she can't add to the humiliation.

Now straddling Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian begins to lower his face closer and closer to Lan Wangji.

Lan Zhan and Wei Ying awkwardly avoids each other's eyes as Lan Xichen's mind just shuts down.

"Get off."

Determined, Wei Wuxian thickened his face. "No."

Golden eyes stare at him as Lan Wangji repeats, "Get off."

"No. You should have known this would happen if you allowed me to sleep here." Wei Wuxian replied.

Eyes still on Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji asks one last time, "Are you sure that this is what you want?"

Faces became more and more red as the exchange continues on.

"Errrmmm... we're not going to be seeing things we shouldn't be... right?"

Wei Wuxian blushed from head to toe as he shouted "Nothing happened!!!!!"

A small voice told him to be careful of what he says next before a numbness flared from his waist and his legs collapsed. His body fell on top of Lan Wangji as his head lays on top of his chest.

"Then stay like this for the whole night."

THUD

Lan Wangji looks over to the collapsed Lan Qiren before addressing Wen Qing, "Young Lady Wen... could you be so kind and check on uncle?"

Thankful for the distraction, Wen Qing goes to check Lan Qiren's vitals.

Mind still reeling from what just happened, Wei Wuxian tried to move off but his body did not respond. He was stuck like this until the spell wears out or he is released.

Who is this? Is this still the same Lan Zhan? What could possibly happen in the last 13 years for him to change this much! Shouldn't I be the one with the seized body?

As Lan Wangji shifted beneath him, Wei Wuxian became excited thinking that he was going to now get kicked out. Lan WangJi simply waived his hand.

The lights went out.

"A-YING!" thundered Hua Cheng as he points his finger at Wei Wuxian. Realizing that it was too late to reprimand Wei Wuxian, he changes course and points a finger at Wei Ying. "CHAPARONES UNTIL YOU ARE MARRIED!"

Confused at the outburst, Wei Ying looks to Lan Zhan, "But I thought we're already married..." To this Lan Zhan nods in agreement.

Xie Lian, "Oh no..."

"LAN WANGJI!!!!!!" shouted Hua Cheng as he is pulled to sit back down by Xie Lian.

Deciding perhaps it was better to ask Lan Zhan for an explanation, Lan Xichen smiled at his brother, "Wangji, perhaps you can catch us up to speed? If courting and betrothal gifts are to be prepared we would need to be informed."

Blushing now from ears to cheek, Lan Zhan begins his explanation. "After punishment for...drinking, Wangji went to the Cold Pond to heal. Brother allowed Wei Ying into the Cold Pond. Fierce corpses Shufu brought back escaped in the back hills. Protective shield in Cold Pond pulled Wangji into Cold Caves when we were attacked. Wei Ying was pulled in first."

Wei Ying, "There was a white guqin in the cave that attacked me but not Lan Zhan. I noticed there were rabbits wearing forehead ribbons in the caves but they were not getting attacked either. So I asked Lan Zhan to give me his forehead ribbon. He... he came over and tied our wrists together with his forehead ribbon and the attacks stopped. That was when Lan Yi appeared." Only now he realized why he was no longer attacked. The guqin had recognized him as a Lan now.

Lan Zhan, "Ancestor Lan Yi secluded in the Cold Cave after Baoshan Sanren ascended her mountain. Ancestor Lan Yi's energy sensed Baoshan Sanren's blood enter the pond. Thought... she returned."

Wei Ying, "She used the last of her energy when she pulled me into the cave thinking I was Baoshan Sanren. Lan Zhan and I bowed to her as she faded away."

Lan Qiren, "Wangji tied his forehead ribbon to your wrist to save you, it does not qualify as the union ceremony. There is no marriage to recognize."

Lan Wangji frowns at his uncle. Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian's smiles drops. Before his mind could process it, his body moves on its own accord. Lan Zhan is up from his seat and bowing to Sect Leader Jiang. "Sect Leader Jiang. Wangji apologizes for neglecting to obtain permission to marry Wei Ying. If ritual will not be recognized then Lan Wangji of Gusu Lan Sect humbly requests permission to court Wei Wuxian of Yunmeng Jiang Sect."

Ouyang Zizhen and Lan Jingyi clasps their hands together in excitement. The greatest love story of all time is playing out and they've got front row seats!

Madam Yu, "No."

Turning to his wife, Jiang Fengmian meets her eyes. Yu Ziyuan does not back down. She will not allow her husband to take the brat's side in this. "Marriages are arranged by the parents. He will marry whom I choose. Now that I know the disasters that follow Wei Wuxian, I cannot allow him to marry into Gusu Lan. He will only bring disaster there. Just look at the effect he has on Hanguang-jun. Talking back to his elders."

Jiang Fengmian, "If A-Xian and Lan Wangji loves each other, why come between them? It is obvious that their future selves have suffered enough setbacks."

Yu Ziyuan glares at her husband. "Of course you would take his side! And what of your daughter? He's the reason her engagement is broken. What of her happiness?"

Flinching at the reminder of her broken engagement, Jiang Yanli walked to Wei Ying's side. "Mother, I refuse to get married until A-Xian is betrothed or married. My brother has always put our needs first, it is time we put him first."

Jin ZIxuan shoots up from his seat, "Young Lady Jiang and I will wait for however long is needed for Wei Wuxian to marry the one he loves."

A melodic voice drifts from the back of the hall as a female cultivator in white slowly walks to the front, "I hate to break it to you Madam Yu. You do not have the privilege to arrange A-Ying's marriage. I do."

Eyeing the cultivator with suspicion, Madam Yu demands, "And who exactly are you?

Smiling softly, the cultivator replies, "Baoshan Sanren, A-Ying's grandmother."

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is keeping track:
Lan Jingyi - 60
Lan Sizhui - 30

A Grandmother Is Both The Sword And The Shield

Chapter Summary

No one out argues Grandma.

It's not smut but Hua Cheng's not happy...

Part 1 of The Waterborne Abyss

Edit: just minor grammar edits =)

Chapter Notes

Recap:

*Viewers from the present are pulled during the Archery Competition in Qishan. (After Cloud Recesses studies)

*Viewers from the future are from 15 years post WWX "resurrection" (28 years since his death)

*The Junior Ducklings are technically Senior Ducklings now. But they are still referred to as the "younger boys" even though they are technically older than their Senior's counterparts.

*There *may* be 2 arrays. One in the future and a second in the past. But who has knowledge of the future in the past?

*Jin Ling wants the record to show he did NOT touch the array.

*Lots of Madam Yu bashing

*Lots of Jin Guangshan bashing

*The Head Shaker is SUS.

*Madam Jin is plotting

*Baby XuanLi and Baby WangXian are on their way to their happy ever afters.

*XXC and SL are hiding in the back.

*HuaLian are WWX's adoptive parents after his death.

*Jin Guangshan is paralyzed by WQ per XL's request but he can still run his mouth so he keeps digging his grave deeper because he's an idiot. HC's foot slipped once on the back of his head... it might happen again.

*HC is always willing to knock some sense into people like LQR

*Grandma Baoshan Sanren has just joined the party.

*Madam Yu is pissing her robes

Why are so many people hiding in the back???

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying are immediately on their feet as their eyes fall on their grandmother. The woman of legend. One that had always been a dream of theirs to meet. *She's here!* Sharing excited glances with their beloveds, the boys move to greet her. In his excitement, Wei Ying stumbles and is saved from embarrassing himself by Lan Zhan's grip on his forearm. Eyes never leaving her for more than a few seconds, Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying bowed low to greet their grandmother.

Baoshan Sanren. Yu Ziyuan can count on one hand the number of times she has been afraid. First was that ill fated night hunt she had joined Jiang Fengmian, Wei Changze, and the Lan Brothers. Lan Qiren's refusal to break the Lan rules caused a delay leading to heavy injuries and both Jiang Fengmian and Wei Changze was so close to death's door. That was... until the future Madam Lan, Chen Fengjiu, and *that woman* showed up.

The second, when A-Li fell ill at only months old. When no healer could tell them why she got sick nor how to treat it. Weeks passed and still no healer could come up with a remedy. Until *that woman* and Wei Changze convinced Jiang Fengmian to meet with a family of healers from Dafan Mountain. Her daughter was healed but now she owes *her* a debt.

Now? Now, here stands *that woman's* mother. The Immortal who has never bothered with the cultivation world. Only ever forbidding her disciples from coming back if they leave her mountain. The reclusive Immortal herself has descended her mountain to claim her rights as Wei Wuxian's last living relative. Rumors of the power she yields had traveled far over the years and she has become revered. It does not bode well if she takes issue with what is being shown.

Calling on her courage Madam Yu countered, "Jiang Fengmian took him off the streets, brought him into our home, and raised him better than his own children. Wei Wuxian is a disciple of Yunmeng Jiang and the adopted child of Jiang Fengmian. We have every right to decide his marriage."

The irony of her words makes Baoshan Sanren and several others laugh as she greeted Taizi Dianxia and Hua Chengzhu. "Were you not the one just moments ago shouting that he was

the son of a servant? Now that his happiness is to be decided, you deemed it more profitable to play the mother's role you've neglected until now."

Madam Yu, "We took him off the streets and raised him from the age of 9. We gave him the same education and training as our own children! He was given more than one of his station deserves. It is only fair for that son of a servant to repay the sect through his marriage prospects."

And there it was. Jiang Fengmian knows there is nothing he can say to defend his wife after her words so he closes his eyes and waits for condemnation. Jiang Yanli and Jiang Cheng stare at their mother in shock. They've known their mother labeled Wei Wuxian as the source of her discontentment. But for her to expect that he would repay them by giving up his future happiness... it was too much.

Several Sect Leaders nod their heads in agreement. It's only expected for a disciple to repay the sect's kindness through a profitable marriage. There were however, many more who thought it was self serving and immoral to force disciples to repay kindness that was due to them as a part of the sect and as a human being.

Anger courses through Baoshan Sanren as she responds, "Were you not the one who blamed all her insecurities on him? Were you not the one to inflict those wounds on his person? Were you not the one to degrade and demand he knows his place? Were you not the one to destroy your own marriage by listening to rumors? Rumors that were started by Jin Guangshan when Cangse rejected his advances. Rumors that Sect Leader Yao was more than happy to spread to get in the Jin's good graces. "

Madam Yu opens her mouth to reply only for it to seal shut. Eyes snap to the Lans who are also speechless and confused.

Who cast the Silencing Spell?

Hua Cheng smirks as Xie Lian schools his expressions. Baoshan-mei is just getting started.

Baoshan Sanren stepped closer to Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian, patting a warm hand on their cheeks. "Time flows differently on my mountain. I did not know of A-Ying's existence nor of my daughter's death until I descended my mountain 5 years after A-Ying's death. It was then that I began to look into his life. For years, he suffered the insults and rumors passed around about his background. Insulted for being the son of a servant or scorned for being the rumored love child of Jiang Fengmian when the situation fits. Did anyone for a single moment stop to think: How can he be the son of a servant if he is also the son of Jiang Fengmian? He can't be both, now can he? Everyone knows Cangse Sanren was no servant."

Ignoring the whispers, Baoshan Sanren pats Wei Ying's head, "Before he was the Yunmeng Jiang Head Disciple, he was the son of the Right Hand of Sect Leader Jiang, Wei Changze, who was a disciple not a servant. He was the son of Cangse Sanren, the daughter and disciple of the Immortal Baoshan Sanren. The sworn sister of Madam Lan. I see no 'son of a servant' here."

Gasps floated around the hall as the news that Cangse Sanren was actually the sworn sister of the late Madam Lan was passed around. There was still much mystery around the two female cultivators that any news was received with anticipation.

Wei Ying and Lan Zhan looked to Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji for confirmation, receiving nods in return. If both mothers were still alive, they would have met under different circumstances.

Leveling an unimpressed look at Madam Yu, Baoshan Sanren addresses Lan Qiren next. "Correct me if I am mistaken, if a clan elder of higher ranking than one's parents gives their blessing during the union ceremony then the marriage is binding. Whether it was done to protect one or the other. Is that correct, Lan Qiren?"

Begrudgingly, Lan Qiren nods, "So long as the clan elder has a higher ranking than both parents of those seeking to wed."

Baoshan Sanren, "Then is Lan Yi not of a higher status than Qingheng-Jun and Madam Lan? As an Ancestor as well as a former Sect Leader, she has higher rank than all the Lan elders combined."

Not backing down,, Lan Qiren countered, "Wangji wrapped his forehead ribbon around Wei Wuxian's wrist to protect him from the Lan Yi's Chord Assassination. It will not be recognized as a valid union."

Baoshan Sanren, "Qingheng-Jun wrapped his forehead ribbon around Chen Fengjiu's wrist to protect her from your clan elders. By your reasoning, is that marriage also not valid? The only difference between them is that one was being framed as a murderer and the other was being attacked by your clan’s spiritual tool."

Lan Xichen and Lan Zhan are both speechless. No one has talked about their parents' situation for as long as they've been alive. To this day, no one knows what transpired that day other than their mother was said to have killed their father's teacher. Was their mother framed for a murder she didn't commit?

Lan Qiren looks away as the accusation hits where it hurts. If he denies the validity of Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian's marriage, then he will inadvertently invalidate his brother's marriage and his nephews' birth rights will be questioned.

Lan Xichen decided it was best to intervene now before things got out of hand. "Perhaps we can take this opportunity to have Wangji and Young Master Wei formally begin courting and then we can hold a ceremony. That way the validity of the union could not be questioned in the future."

Nodding her approval, Baoshan Sanren adds, "That is acceptable. However, Lan Wangji, your request to court A-Ying should be given to Taizi Dianxia and Hua Chengzhu. They are his true adoptive parents with my approval."

Lan Zhan wastes no time to present his request to Xie Lian and Hua Cheng. Hua Cheng folds his arms across his chest as he lays out the terms, "You are to be chaperoned until you are

married. No hand holding. No hugging. No kissing!"

A determined glint flashes in Lan Zhan's eyes as he nods his consent. He will do whatever it takes. It is the least Wei Ying deserved.

Not believing what he's hearing, Wei Ying begins to pout, "haaaahhhhh?!??!?! Hua-gege!!! I'm willing to bet you did all those things with Xie-gege before you were married! Don't be so mean to A-Ying..." Doing his best impression of a wide eyed bunny (because dogs are evil), Wei Ying pulls on Hua Cheng's sleeve.

Xie Lian chuckles as he elbows a frowning Hua Cheng, "We'll revisit the terms after this is done."

Baoshan Sanren, "Now let's get back to the viewing. I want to see A-Ying and A-Zhan kill the Xuanwu."

A gentle breeze blows through the Library Pavilion as a young Lan Wangji sits at a desk to copy the texts before him. Sprawled out behind another desk was Wei Wuxian.

"Oh! This was when you were punished for a month!" Nie Huaisang excitedly shouted.

Nie Mingjue, "A month? What exactly did Young Master Wei do?"

"I wonder if they're going to show when you swapped out the books!" Nie Huaisang deflected. Nie Mingjue scowled at his younger brother. Of course it would have something to do with him...

Wei Ying, "Why am I always the only one to get punish... ah" Wei Ying let his question die as his eyes look from Lan Qiren to Madam Yu before switching back to the screen.

Rolling back and forth on the ground, Wei Wuxian complains, "This is torture! Brother Wangji, I have to ask... Do you actually really hate me?"

After a few moments of silence, he turns to look at Lan Wangji but the boy was steadfastly focusing on his work. "You're still ignoring me." A slight pout in his tone.

Wei Wuxian makes his way over to Lan Wangji's desk and reclines on the floor with one leg propped up, "What should I call you so you'll respond to me?"

"Husband... call him husband." Snickered Ouyang Zizhen and his friends.

"Wangji?"

"Lan Wangji?"

"Lan Zhan!" Lan Zhan's brush slightly stuttered before recovering like nothing happened.

Jiang Cheng and Jiang Wanyin face palmed as Lan Qiren's eyebrows jerks at the overly familiar address.

"Or... Young Master Lan?"

Jin Ling, "Wow... I know Jiujiu said you were annoying when you were younger Da-Jiu but... this is really annoying."

Lan Jingyi, "Yea. Hanguang-Jun must love you already to put up with your antics..."

Ouyang Zizhen, "Its like his version of pulling a girl's hair. Except he's asking for his own burial messing with HanguangJun!"

Pouting to his husband, Wei Wuxian cries, "Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan! You see how they pick on poor old me?"

"Mn." Lan Wangji spares the boys a look. "5 copies each. A-Ying is only 3 years old, do not pick on him."

Eyes stare at Lan Wangji dumbstruck as Wei Wuxian pouts to Xie Lian. Did... the Second Jade just make a joke?

"Oh I know!!!"

"Lan Er-ge!!"

The scene suddenly shifts as Wei Wuxian is pushed to the ground. Before he can utter a single word, Lan Wangji's lips are upon his. Forceful and demanding.

"..."

"LAN WANGJI!!" It takes all the strength Nie Huaisang can muster to keep Jiang Cheng in his seat and Nie Mingjue puts a hand on the boy's shoulder to keep him in place.

Xie Lian has his arms around Hua Cheng pinning him to his chair. Face flushed from the scene.

Lan Wangji has Wei Wuxian's hands captured and held above his head in one hand while his other hand wraps around Wei Wuxian's nape to lift his face forward. The action makes Wei Wuxian's lips part open and Lan Wangji presses suit with his tongue.

Lan Qiren coughs up a little blood as he slumps in his seat next to an equally shocked Lan Xichen. Cultivators blushed brightly and awkward coughs ring out as eye contact is avoided.

Their bodies are pressed closer and Lan Wangji's knee parts Wei Wuxian's thighs causing a sensual moan to escape from Wei Wuxian.

Lan Zhan prays for the ground to swallow him up whole. He was not prepared for his intimate fantasies to be shown at all.

Although Wei Wuxian has seen (and experienced) the fantasy through the incense burner, having it publicly shown made him blush as red as Wei Ying.

As sudden as it began, the scene returns back to normal. Wei Wuxian is still reclined on the ground with one leg propped up as if nothing had happened. Lan Wangji, still impeccable, sits at his desk copying his texts. He lets out a small breath to regulate his thoughts.

"What..."

"Oh my."

"One really can't judge by outward appearances."

"Did it get hot in here all of a sudden?"

This would be a perfect time to tease Lan Zhan but Wei Ying's mind is still reeling from his own reaction to what he saw. His body was tingling with excitement and anticipation. *Is that the type of thoughts Lan Zhan has of me?*

Wei Wuxian's lips sealed shut as Lan Wangji lifts he head to glare at the troublemaker.

With a sneer, Jin Guangshan once again opened his mouth, "Impeccable is it now? I do admire your self restraint, Lan Wangji. It was quite a tempting display in front of you."

Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen settle disapproving glances on Jin Guangshan. Smacking her husband on the back of his head, Madam Jin hissed out, "No one is as disgusting as you are, *husband.* Everyone has more self control than you! Keep your mouth shut before you find yourself torn to shreds by The Ghost King."

Time speeds through as day after day Wei Wuxian attempts to get a reaction out of Lan Wangji only to end up silenced time and again.

Until one day, Wei Wuxian shows up at the Library Pavillion with *Suibian* in hand. Standing by the book shelf with Lan An's book of poetry in hand, Lan Wangji tracks his movement.

Wei Wuxian subtly eyes the book in Lan Wangji's hand. "Second Young Master Lan, it's already been a month. I won't be coming tomorrow so I have a gift for you! Here!"

Putting the book down on the shelf,, Lan Wangji turns the drawing to himself and a small smile graces his lips. The viewers can see an beautifully drawn image of Lan Wangji kneeling before his desk and reading. The smile turns unti a frown as Wei Wuxian releases his grip on the drawing to reveal that he drew a flower in Lan Wangji's hair.

Nie Huaisang, "Brother Wei! That drawing looks amazing! How come you don't draw more often?"

With a glance to her mother, Jiang Yanli replies, "It's... not... encouraged at Lotus Pier."

Several faces darkened with displeasure. Another strike against that sorry excuse for a mother.

Wei Wuxian, "Well? Do you like the gift, Second Young Master Lan?

"Ridi-"

Wei Wuxian, "Let me guess "ridiculous" again, isn't it? Can't you say anything new? Add some more words?"

"Very ridiculous."

Laughing as if Lan Wangji had told the funniest joke, Wei Wuxian retreated to his desk. "I asked to you add more words and you really did!"

Returning to his book of poetry, Lan Wangji flips the book a few pages before furiously threw the book to the ground. The book opened up to show images of men in intimate positions.

Ah... no wonder the trick looked familiar. Thought Lan Sizhui.

Lan Jingyi and the other boys gape at the screen. "Senior Wei just... SENIOR WEI!!!! YOU HAVE TO TEACH US!!"

The clearing of throats from the elders reminded the boys that others were witnessing their behavior.

Lan Qiren, "5 copies each for you three."

"But I'm not -" Jin Ling starts to argue when he is cut off by Jiang Wanyin.

Jiang Wanyin, "Make that 10 for Jin Ling for talking back."

"Wei Ying!"

Images of Wei Wuxian being pushed up against book cases or walls flash quickly through the white cloth before Lan Wangji gets his mind back in control.

Unknowing of Lan Wangji's internal dilemma, Wei Wuxian raises his hand and cackles, "I'm here! I'm here!"

"You!" Lan Wangji manages out as he unsheathes *Bichen*.

Cuddling up to his husband, Wei Wuxian apologizes, "Ah... seeing things this way makes the things I did seem so cruel. Lan Zhan, I'm so sorry for being such an idiot!"

Lan Wangji, "Mn. Not your fault. Was confused and couldn't communicate properly with Wei Ying."

Grabbing his own sword before jumping to stand up, Wei Wuxian shoots back, "Manners, Second Young Master Lan! Manners! If we fight, your library will be destroyed!"

The scene shifts again as Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji jump to both grab at the spring book that was thrown in the air during their fight.

"Let... go." LAN Wangji demanded through gritted teeth.

"Why? You said you don't look at these books. Ohhh or do you really want to read these books but are pretending otherwise?" Wei Wuxian teased.

"I. WON'T. LOOK." Each word punctuated through gritted teeth. In the blink of an eye, Lan Wangji pushed a burst of spiritual energy into the book and blew it apart.

The younger boys watch with stars in their eyes. Taking in every detail.

Wei Wuxian, "What a waste of a perfectly good book! Everyone says you're the paradigm of a young cultivator. Look at you now!"

"SCRAM!!"

And like that, everyone watched as the Second Jade of Lan loses his composure.

Bustling sounds of a market place fill the hall as Caiyi Town comes into view. Boats float leisurely on the river as vendors line the path along the lake..

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin sit beside a restaurant as they each enjoy a dessert. Wei Wuxian watches the locals haggle and argue in the Gusu dialect.

Wei Wuxian, "These people are so soft spoken and polite when they argue... if they were in Yunmeng it would sound like people are arguing even though they're just chit chatting." To this Jiang Wanyin agrees.

Yunmeng has always been known for their free spirit and boisterous personalities. At times it becomes a bit of a shock for many who did not grow up in the area and they can feel overwhelmed.

Wei Ying, "Lan Zhan! You really should come visit Lotus Pier one day! I'll take you to all the good places!"

Lan Zhan, "Mn."

"We're in luck! Lan Zhan is busy hunting water spirits with Lan Xichen. Lan Qiren went to the Discussion Conference in Qinghe. Good luck is here and there's no way to stop it!"

"Good luck? You basically offended the Lan Clan already. When Lan Qiren comes back, he'll definitely punish you." Jiang Wanyin warned.

Throwing and arm around his brother's shoulders, Wei Wuxian replied, "You've buried my body so many times already! What difference does one more time make? Come on, I smell rice wine!"

Ouyang Zizhen, "Senior Wei really loves his wine. Does he go to Caiyi whenever he wants to drink?"

Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui share a glance before Lan Sizhui answers, "Hanguang-Jun lets Senior Wei drink as much as he wants in the Jingshi. And they do occasionally go to Caiyi for dinner."

With one leap, Wei Wuxian hops onto a boat and steers it in the direction he smells the rice wine. Passing under the walk bridge where Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen were looking out towards the guest disciples. "Brother, why did you invite them to come with us Fighting? They're not serious in these matters. It's a dangerous journey."

Smiling at his younger brother, Lan Xichen assured him, "Young Master Jiang and Young Master Wei have a good reputation in Yunmeng for being highly capable. From your expression, I believed you wanted Young Master Wei to join us. Hence why I agreed. Is that not true?"

Lan Wangji was silent for a moment before he turned and walked away from his brother's knowing smile. "That's not true."

Squealing, Wei Wuxian bumps his husband's shoulder. "Lan Zhan! Lan Zhan! Look how adorable you were."

Back on the water, Wei Wuxian is hailed by the fruit vendors as he sped past. Distracted, his boat accidentally rams into Jin Zixuan's boat. Wei Wuxian turns to bow in apology, "My apologies, Young Master Jin."

Jin Zixuan wipes the spilled rice wine from his person as he glares at Wei Wuxian. "Wei Wuxian, was that intentional? It's a wide river and you just happen to hit my boat?"

Jin Zixuan's stomach drops as he remembers the words he said to Wei Wuxian that day.

Fighting his growing irritation, Wei Wuxian replied, "I was distracted for a moment. I can buy you more rice wine."

Jin Zixuan, "No need for that."

Wei Wuxian, "All right, if you say so. I'll just -"

"A-Li-" Jin Zixuan starts but is cut off by his own words.

"Just make sure the Jiang Clan of Yunmeng stays away from me."

He watches as hurt flashed in her eyes before she pulled her lips into a stiff smile.

Jin Zixuan quickly rushes to explain himself before things can get worse. "I resented Yunmeng Jiang because of the forced engagement. I felt like I wasn't given a choice and chose to lash out instead of doing the smart thing and getting to know you. I am truly sorry for all the hurt I've caused you. I swear to you, everything I said in the past is no longer true nor does it represent how I feel now. Give me a chance to make it up to you?"

Jiang Yanli gives him a winning smile as she accepted his apology.

Throwing a glare over his shoulder. Wei Wuxian asks, "What do you mean by saying that?"

Nie Huaisang having witnessed the exchange steered his boat to intersect the two. "Now, calm down. Just calm down, ok?"

With a look of utter disgust thrown towards Wei Wuxian, Jin Zixuan advises, "Huaisang, If you lay down with dogs, you'll end up with fleas. Be more discerning of who you call a friend. Don't neglect your studies or your brother will have words for you."

Internally smacking himself, Jin Zixuan bows low in apology to the Jiangs. "This one is deeply ashamed for my actions and words. I humbly ask for your forgiveness and will endeavor to do better in the future."

Jiang Fengmian pulls him up from his bow and puts a hand on his shoulder, "Owning up to one's mistakes is the first step. We accept your apology."

Wei Ying and Jiang Cheng scoff and turn back to watching the cloth.

Shadows dashed around under the boats as one dark shadow dashes towards Nie Huaisang's boat. Using its momentum in the water to break the surface, a water ghoul flies directly at Nie Huaisang.

Nie Mingjue reflexively shoots to his feet to protect his brother only to feel tugging on his sleeve. Looking down, he sees both versions of his younger brother by his side. Feeling calmer, he sits back down as Lan Xichen smiles at him.

A bamboo pole swings across the white cloth and slams the water ghoul back into the water. All around, more water ghouls break the surface to climb onto land and attach the merchants and vendors on the street. Wei Wuxian uses *Suibian* to slash at the ghouls on land to free several civilians.

Nie Mingjue, "Young Master Wei, thank you for protecting Huaisang."

Wei Ying, "Ah... it was nothing! Anyone would have done the same!"

At Nie Huaisang's cry for help, Wei Wuxian turns in time to see a heavy set ghoul jump onto Nie Huaisang's boat and sank half of it under water. More ghouls blocked Wei Wuxian and Jin Zixuan's way as they tried to save Nie Huaisang before a pale blue sword glare cut through the ghoul attacking Nie Huaisang.

Climbing out on shaky knees, Nie Huaisang stammers out a thank you before realizing it was Lan Xichen who came to his rescue, "Thank you, Xi... Xichen-ge."

Nie Mingjue nods his thanks to Lan Xichen and receives a smile in return.

The water ghouls retreat as Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji show up and began throwing sealing talismans.

Nie Huaisang returns to the docks as the rest follow Lan Xichen to investigate Biling Lake.

As Lotus Lier is surrounded by lakes, Yunmeng is no stranger to water ghouls but there was something odd about these water ghouls. "Has Caiyi Town ever had water ghouls before, Young Master Lan?"

Letting out a sigh, Lan Xichen answers, "Never before. The nets caught many ghouls that day but the locals did not recognize most of the bodies."

"Hmm, very odd." Jiang Fengmian replied.

Looking thoughtfully at the water, Wei Wuxian pondered. "So we can't catch it with just nets alone. If only there was something like a compass that can help point out where the ghouls are."

Ah... so that's how the Black Wind Flags came about.

Jiang Cheng, "EY! Focus on the water and catching ghouls. Don't start daydreaming now..."

Laughing, Wei Wuxian responds, "Cultivation and flying on swords used to be crazy dreams."

Chapter End Notes

For those keeping tracking:

LJY - 70
LSZ -35 (accidentally subtracted 5 instead of adding x_x)
JL -15
OZZ- 10

Ships Will Sink In Black Water

Chapter Summary

Part 2 of the Waterborn Abyss

There's no love for Su She here...

Chapter Notes

I got caught up re-reading TGCF and fell behind on writing ahahahahaha 🤣😬

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pebbles crunch under white boots as it makes its way towards the Hanshi. A knock on the door pulls Lan Xichen from his meditation.

Lan Xichen, "Come in."

"Xichen."

Smiling at his uncle, Lan Xichen gestures for him to sit before reaching to serve the tea. After 2 years of his self assigned seclusion, Uncle showed up one morning to have tea. For the first time ever, uncle and nephew had a heart to heart.

Uncle spoke of his brother who locked himself and his love away to appease the elders. Who remained in seclusion even after her death. Xichen spoke of the brother of his heart who betrayed their brotherhood. Of the man who condemned innocents at the behest of his father to win his approval. And then they spoke of the events at the Guanyin Temple. Of Lan Wangji. Of Wei Wuxian.

Uncle came back the next day and the one after that. Each day tea was made and served. Each day another knot was untied. A year later, Jiang Wanyin physically dragged Lan Xichen out of seclusion when both Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian were seriously injured during a night hunt that turned out to be an ambush for the Yiling Laozu. Together they tracked down the culprits and brought the Might of both Gusu Lan and Yunmeng Jiang down on the remnants of Moling Su and Jin Guangyao supporters. Lan Xichen ended his seclusion that day when he realized how much repenting he had left to do towards his brother and brother in law.

And like that, another 12 years passed. Their families healed and bonded. Wei Wuxian's notes from his time in the Burial Mounds were returned to him by Lanling Jin and preserved in the Forbidden Library for future generations. Notes that Uncle had shown up one day carried in his arms.

Pouring his uncle a cup of tea, Lan Xichen inquired, "Uncle. Have they already set out?"

Lan Qiren accepts the tea cup and blows to cool it down. "Mn. They, along with the boys, have left to meet with A-Cheng and A-Ling before heading to Qishan. Huaisang will meet them there."

Lan Xichen unfurls a scroll and lays it flat on the table before turning it towards his uncle. Taking one last look at the array in front of him, Lan Qiren nods.

"It's time."

Sweeping the surrounding area with a quick glance, Wei Wuxian notices Lan Wangji's boat sitting oddly on the water. Jumping up and down in his boat, Wei Wuxian shouts to get Lan Wangji's attention, "Lan Zhan! Look at me, look at me!"

Turning his head towards Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji glimpses a bamboo pole slamming against the water surface as Wei Wuxian's boat barrels towards his own boat.

Hopping between his boat and Lan Wangji's to land on the top of his own boat, Wei Wuxian uses his bamboo pole to slam against Lan Wangji's boat to flip it high above their heads.

Jumping to Lan Xichen's boat to avoid the collision, Lan Wangji faces Wei Wuxian in anger, "You-"

Yu Ziyuan, "Must you embarrass Yunmeng Jiang everywhere you go?!?!"

Xie Lian, "My... Are you sure he's the embarrassment of Yunmeng Jiang?"

"San Niang! Enough!" Jiang Fengmian bows to Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren, "On behalf of Yunmeng Jiang, I apologize for my Head Disciple's behavior. "

Lan Qiren was preparing to reprimand Wei Ying when he was distracted by the scene on the cloth.

Lan Wangji is cut off when the boat flips upside down as it descended to reveal three water ghouls clinging to the bottom. A nearby Lan disciple quickly suppresses them as the rest look on awe.

Water ghouls.

Ah...

Lan Xichen, "Young Master Wei, how did you know there were spirits on the bottom of Wangji's boat?"

Jin Ling, "Yea! How did you figure that out by just looking at the boat?!?"

Lan Jingyi and Ouyang Zizhen nodded in agreement. Lan Sizhui had turned green just looking at the scene on the cloth so he sat down as he waited for Senior Wei to answer.

Wei Ying just pointed to the cloth indicating he's about to explain in the scene.

Smiling as he landed back on the bough of his own boat, Wei Wuxian taps the side of his boat with his pole. "Easy. The water disbursement was off. There was only one person on the boat, but it sat deeper than the boat with two people. So there was something was clinging to the bottom of the boat."

Nodding in acknowledgement, Lan Xichen complimented, "You are experienced indeed."

Nie Mingjue, "Very observative, Young Master Wei. You are a credit to your Sect." The last line was said while he caught Madam Yu's eyes. Daring her to comment.

Uneasy with the compliment, Wei Wuxian diverts his attention to Lan Wangji, "Lan Zhan, I didn't mean to splash water on you. Water spirits are tricky. If I said anything, they would hear me and run off. Hey, don’t ignore me. Why won’t you look at me, Second Young Master Lan? Lan-"

Sparing him a glare, Lan Wangji demanded "Why did you come?"

Letting some seriousness slip into his tone, Wei Wuxian apologized, "I’m here to apologize to you. The library incident was my fault. I was wrong."

Many minds flashed to what they were shown of Lan Wangji's fantasy before recalling the spring book prank, causing several cultivators to blush brightly again.

Lan Wangji's countenance remained dark, memories of how Wei Wuxian had last "apologized" still fresh on his mind.

Seeing Lan Wangji's dark look, Wei Wuxian hurried to assure him, "Why do you like that? Don’t worry. I’m really here to help. Lan-"

"Stay away from me."

Jin Guangshan laughed. "That's not how to speak to your love interest, Second Young Master Lan. I'd be more than happy to teac...mmmmn mmmnnmmfffhh."

Baoshan Sanren, "We do not need your vile input. Don't waste your energy trying to break this silencing. It can't be broken unless I release you."

The Lans share shocked looks. Founding Elders of Gusu Lan were rumored to be able cast a version of the Lan Silencing Spell that cannot be broken unless released by the caster or

another Founding Elder. Who exactly is Baoshan Sanren?

Having had enough of his Shixiong's antics, Jiang Wanyin shouted at him. "If you want to help, then stop bothering Second Young Master Lan and come back over here!"

Ignoring his Shidi, Wei Wuxian noticed the water turning a dark color and giddily said, "It's here, it's here!"

Ghastly hands suddenly popped out from under the water to pull at the sides of the boats as thick black bands begin to attack the cultivators directly.

"What are those things?"

"This has to be more than just water ghouls! Water ghouls do not attack like that."

Lan Xichen, "Unfortunately, it turned out to be a Waterborne Abyss."

Nie Mingjue frowned, "In Caiyi?"

Lan Wangji unsheathes Bichen and proceeds to slash at several hands hanging on the side of his boat as black tendrils attacks him from behind.

A red sword glare flashes past Lan Wangji and deflects the tendrils before they can reach him. Attempting to follow the red glare, he sees Wei WuXian's sword has already returned to its sheath. Lan Wangji had noticed its speed and quality earlier. "What's the name of this sword?"

Wei Wuxian, "Whatever."

Jiang Yanli giggles into her sleeve as Jiang Fengmian shakes his head as the age old joke plays out.

Unimpressed, Lan Wangji gives him a condescending look. "This sword has a spirit. It's offensive to address it as I wish."

Rolling his eyes, Wei Wuxian directed his sword to continue attacking the water ghouls attached to the sides of the boats. "I wasn't asking you to call it whatever you wanted to. The sword's name really is Suibian. Here, look!"

Pulling his sword back into its sheath, Wei Wuxian passed the sword over for Lan Wangji to see the name engraved on it. True enough, the two characters for Suibian were engraved onto the weapon. Disapproval once again crossed Lan Wangji's countenance.

Wei Wuxian, "I know, I know. You want to ask why I picked this name. If there is any special meaning. Actually when Uncle Jiang gave it to me, I had thought of over twenty names, but I wasn't happy with any of them. So I said, Whatever. But after the sword had been forged, these two characters were on it. It's not a bad name actually."

"Ridiculous."

The younger boys looked at Wei Wuxian in awe. Spiritual swords seldom choose their own names when they are forged. For Wei Wuxian's sword to come out of the forge already engraved means that it chose that name for itself.

Wen Qing, "Your sword is as ridiculous as you are."

Jin Ling, "Wait... didn't your sword seal itself too?"

The past cultivators regarded Wei Wuxian with confusion as Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian avoided eye contact with the past cultivators.

It's quite rare for a spiritual sword to seal itself upon its wielder's death. How powerful did his core become for his sword to seal itself?

Noticing black tendrils trying to sneak up on him, Jiang Wanyin drew his sword and slashed at it before warning the others, "Be careful. There is something in the water."

Dark shadows swim past the boats in the water as the nets dragged as if it caught something. However, when pulled up, the nets were empty.

Wei Wuxian, "There's something weird going on here. Lan Zhan, beside your boat!"

Bichen is unsheathed and stabbed into the water before Wei Wuxian could finish. After a moment, it returned without piercing anything. As Lan Wangji contemplated his sword, a Lan disciple also drew out his sword and directed it to stab into the water. But the sword never resurfaced no matter how hard the disciple tried to recall it, growing more pale as time went by.

Lan Sizhui, "Guys... Does he look familiar to you?"

Lan Jingyi studied the disciples face for a while and replied, "Yeah! But where have we seen him?"

The older disciple sharing his boat berated him for his reckless maneuver. "Su She! We still don't know what the thing inside the water is. Why did you suddenly send your sword underwater like that?"

"SU SHE?!?!?!!?!?!" came four equally incredulous shouts from the younger disciples as they shot to their feet.

Flustered, Su She tried to remain calm as he defended himself, " I saw that Second Young Master also…" Su She cut off as he realized his words and flushed a bright red as if disgraced.

Lan Jingyi sneered at the man's explanation, "You're no where near the level of Hanguang-Jun even in his teenage years... dream on!"

Lan Xichen noted the anger and... disgust?... in the boys' expressions and turned to Lan Wangji to see if they were going to be reprimanded. Instead, the same anger and disgust can be clearly seen on his face.

The boats continued to float to the center of Biling Lake as the water began to darken and take on a dark green hue. Dark shadows in the water began to condense into one solid shape. Jiang Wanyin, Wei Wuxian, Jin Xizuan, and Lan Wangji drove their swords into the water to attack the mass. Their swords returning moments later throwing what looked like strands of hair onto their boats.

Jin Ling and Lan Jingyi couldn't hold in their laughter as they watched the Young Masters drive their swords into the water.

"Everyone's... swords returned but... his!" Jin Ling said in between catching his breath.

Bent over from laughing and holding his middle, Lan Jingyi laughed harder, "And he thought.. he thought he... was some high... and mighty... sect leader?"

The elder sect leaders watched as the boys' seniors did nothing to reprimand them. Confusion followed as Wei Wuxian smiled and attempted to soothe his fellow time travelers only to be glared at by Jiang Wanyin.

Suddenly realizing what it is, Lan Wangji ordered, "Go back immediately! It's a water demon!"

The dark green of the water turned black as the boats began to sink and drift in a circle that was the mouth of a whirlpool.

Lan Xichen, "We won't be able to handle this on our own. We need to focus on saving people. Young Master Jiang and Young Master Wei, you two form a team. Wangji, Young Master Jin, and I are a team. Now let's split up."

Hua Cheng, "It takes a lot of resentment built up over time from dozens of sunken ships to form a water demon. It couldn't have originated from Biling Lake."

Wei Wuxian, "It was chased there..."

Within moments, everyone mounted their swords and moved into position. As if sensing its prey was leaving, the black tendrils begin attacking in earnest. Hovering above his boat, Wei Wuxian is forced to dodge and navigate through the forceful onslaught. Barely dodging in time a few times as the tendrils cut off his path.

Having never seen Senior Wei flying a sword nevertheless wield one, the boys watched with excitement and admiration.

Ouyang Zizhen, "Wow Senior Wei! You're amazing! How come you don't use your sword anymore?"

The innocent question stopped the cultivators short. They hadn't noticed it before but taking a closer look, Wei Wuxian wasn't carrying any sword.

Jiang Fengmian, "A-Xian... where is your sword?"

Jiang Cheng, "Yea! You never go anywhere without your sword!"

Eyes glued to the ground, Wei Wuxian bit out, "Mo Xuanyu's golden core is too weak to wield a sword. But why would I need a sword when Lan Zhan's here to protect me!"

Eyes narrowed in suspicion as they recognized the deflection.

That was when he noticed Su She was stranded on his boat. His sword still had not resurfaced. He was already knee-deep in the water and frozen from fright. Not hesitating, Wei Wuxian darted over and grabbed Su She's wrist to pull him up from the water. Once again, he is dodging and weaving through the renewed onslaught of black tendrils before flying upwards.

Jin Ling, "YOU SAVED HIS LIFE?!?!?!?!"

Incensed, Lan Jingyi shot a shaking finger at the image of Su She as he directed his question to Wei Wuxian. "You... you saved his sorry life. You saved his worthless life and he- It was bad enough he betrayed Gusu Lan when the Wens attacked but he- HE HAD THE NERVE TO TAKE PART IN CAUSING YOUR DEATH?!?!?!?! UNGRATEFUL BASTARD!!!"

Although shaking in anger himself, Lan Sizhui admonished Lan Jingyi, "Jingyi, we shouldn't speak ill of the dead..."

Expression dark, Ouyang ZIzhen grounded out, "He's not dead right now..."

Lans, Nies, and Jiang exchanged worried looks. They had many questions but the biggest one was: Wens attacked the Cloud Recesses?

Lan Qiren, "Lan Jingyi... what do you mean Su Mingshan betrayed Gusu Lan when the Wens attacked?"

Before Lan Jingyi could answer, Lan Wangji spoke up. Qishan Wen sent orders for all clans to send heirs and inner disciples for Indoctrination. Refusal was met with force. Wen Xu brought fire to Cloud Recesses when Gusu Lan refused. We retreated to the Cold Cave. Su She gave his forehead ribbon so they could access it."

"Indoctrination?"

Reeling from the future betrayal, the Lans can only return to the viewing.

Suibian was built for speed not for strength so the ascent from the water began to slow as the front of the sword dipped towards the water.

The tendrils shoot forward from the water to catch the two ascending. Su She flailed around erratically trying to avoid the tendrils. Tiring out, Su She decided an alternative was needed and yanked hard on the arm Wei Wuxian was gripping. Wei Wuxian felt a sudden tug from Su She and braced before it almost knocked him off his balance. Thinking it because of the tendrils, Wei Wuxian forces his sword to ascend faster as Jiang Wanyin shot forward to help Wei Wuxian.

Another hard tug on his arm gave the tendrils enough time to wrap itself around Wei Wuxian's ankle and violently yank him off his sword. Wei Wuxian used the momentum

to throw Su She safely towards Jiang Wanyin.

"Wei Wuxian!" Jiang Wanyin shouted as he stared at his Shixiong falling in horror.

"He was trying to... I'm going to fucking kill him." Jiang Cheng, now on his feet, bellows out.

"Get in line." Hua Cheng grounds out. A single silver wraith flies towards the back of the hall and through a closed door.

Clear evidence of Su She's willingness to harm another to save himself was laid out in front of them. The Lans had to decide the best course of action. Su She cannot be allowed to stay a disciple of Gusu Lan.

Wei Wuxian's body slammed into the water and is dragged to the bottom by black wisps and tendrils. Soon he is pulled into the heart of the abyss as silence overtakes his senses. An erie sense of peace calms his heart and eases his mind.

Wisps of resentment curl around Wei Wuxian's out stretched arm as corpses and bones swirl into view. Words he had spoken in class echoed in his mind.

Spiritual energy is energy...

Resentful energy is energy as well.

Spiritual energy can split mountains and fill oceans.

It's available for human use.

If so, then why can't we also use resentful energy?

Resentment.

I could just stay here. No one can hurt me here. No more pain. No more false smiles. No need to pretend the words do not hurt. No need to be strong. I could just... let it all go.

Worried eyes land on Wei Ying as he averts his. Was his behavior all just for show? Lan Zhan squeezed his hand to gain his attention but Wei Ying only squeezes back.

As if making the decision for him, a white clad arm reaches through the thick resentment and Wei Wuxian feels his collar tighten. He is lifted into the air and Wei Wuxian turns to see that his savior was none other than Lan Wangji.

Shoving aside his thoughts, Wei WuXian spoke, "Lan Zhan, your sword is quite strong! Thank you for saving me but why did you pull on my collar? I don't feel comfortable if you grab me like this. Why don't I stretch my hand to you and you can grab that instead?"

Lan WangJi coldly replied, "I do like physical contact with others."

Wei WuXian, "We're already so close, how am I 'others'?"

Lan WangJi, "We are not."

Wei Wuxian pouted as if hurt by the words, "You can't do this…"

At the end of his patience, Jiang Wanyin scolded, "You can't do this!!! Can't you look at the situation now speak less while you're held in mid-air by your collar?!"

Wei Wuxian shouted back, "Shut up!"

Xie Lian noted the ease in which Wei Ying pushed his feelings aside. Anger once again rose inside him as he turned to address the Jiangs in a cold mocking voice. "It is amazing how easily he's able to push aside his own feelings and disregard them like they do not matter. Are you raising an adopted son or the perfect shield for your children?"

Shocked, it took Jiang Fengmian a few moments before he could reply. "Your highness, I have always treated A-Xian as one of my own children "

Xie Lian, "And yet you say nothing when your wife abuses him! Oh, I see now. You do not speak up for your children either."

Jiang Fengmian, "I -"

"He is a disciple of Yunmeng Jiang and his training falls under my authority. I will discipline him as I see fit." Madam Yu interupted.

The door is slammed open at the back of the hall and spiritual energy fluctuates again. A man in black walks through the door dragging a Jin and a Nie disciple in each arm. They are thrown carelessly on the ground where they lay unconscious. Both are instantly recognized, Jin Zixun and Meng Yao.

"I see...then I will sink your ships that are in my waters as I see fit." Said the newcomer.

Madam Yu turns on the newly arrived stranger, "Are you threatening the Yunmeng Jiang's ships? There will be war!"

Stepping close to Yu Ziyuan, He Xuan looks her in the eye. "Those waters are a part of my domain. I will sink whatever ship I want. Better yet, the whole of Lotus Pier could be under water now as we speak."

Yu Ziyuan stepped back in fear as she finally realized this was no ordinary cultivator. Jiang Fengmian grips her elbow to steady her before he bends into a bow of apology.

Even before he could speak, Hua Cheng spoke from his seat. "Black Water, what took so long?"

Black Water... Black Water Submerging Boats? The Ghost King who rules the waters of Yunmeng?

The Jiangs pale and Yu Ziyuan collapses to the ground before the Ghost King when realization dawns. Yu Ziyuan had just declared war... on a Ghost King. Not just any Ghost King... but one whose favor Yunmeng relied on for their livelihoods.

Completely ignoring the Jiangs then, He Xuan made his way to the front. Patting a shocked Wei Ying on his head as he passed by. "The distance-shortening array doesn't work with more than 3 people when coming here. The others should be here soon."

OTHERS???

Taking a seat next to Hua Cheng, "What'd I miss?"

The trip back into Caiyi was quiet as they each were caught up in their own thoughts. Wei Wuxian sits on the bow of his boat, staring at his reflection in the water.

"Here, your sword." Jiang Wanyin's boat drifts closer to Wei Wuxian's. "What's on your mind?"

Wei Wuxian shakes his head and answered, "Nothing. Just thinking about where that Waterborne Abyss came from. Everyone in Caiyi Town can swim. Gusu Lan would have taken care of any reports of more than few ships sinking right away. It's not likely for one to take form here."

In their own boat, Lan Wangji asked his brother, "Brother, do you know if any place has recently had an increase in shipwrecks and water demons?"

Lan Xichen simply pointed to the sun in the sky.

Qishan Wen.

Wen Qing let out a sigh, she knew this would happen when she heard who was assigned the task to rid the waters of the demons. "Wen Rouhan tasked Wen Chao to deal with the Waterborne Abyss. He returned and reported that it had been suppressed and dealt with."

"That's outrageous."

"They couldn't take care of it so they chased it here. Bringing harm to others!"

Jiang Cheng, "The Wens are very powerful right now. Most of the smaller clans rely on them so they've become domineering. We can't point a finger at them without proof anyways."

Wei Wuxian, "But if we keep letting them get away with these things sooner or later there will be disaster."

A Jin disciple sneered at Wei Wuxian, "It's easy for Wei Wuxian to say. If Yunmeng Jiang can't stand being pushed around, then just fight back. Why drag other clans

down with them?"

Jin Zixuan shot the disciple a reproachful look,, "If everyone only worries about themselves, then it won't be long before all clans become servants of the Wen Clan."

The elder Sect Leaders share a look. They've known about the Wens' increasing arrogance and had chosen to not speak of it so long as it didn't affect their sects.

Yet here Wei Wuxian is speaking of holding the Wens accountable for their actions before a bigger disaster occurred. And he was right in the end was he not?

Jiang Wanyin, "The sword hits the person who takes the lead. Don't ever bring that up again. Stay out of trouble."

Chuckling, Wei Wuxian agreed, "I know. Just mind my own business, right? Even if I don't say anything, someone else should."

Rolling his eyes, Jiang Wanyin punched his shoulder, "For heaven's sake..."

Lan Xichen followed his brother's gaze to see that Wei Wuxian was flirting with the fruit vendors on the side of the lake.

Suddenly Wei Wuxian shouted while pointing to Lan Wangji, " Miss, don't you think he's good-looking?"

Several shouts of "Yeah, he's even more handsome!" came as a reply causing Lan Wangji to stiffen up more.

Wei Wuxian sent his boat forward to speak to Lan Wangji, "Lan Zhan, I like the Gusu accent! Can you teach me how to curse in your dilect?"

Lan Wangji froze as Wei Wuxian's boat pulled in close.

Grabbing Wei Wuxian's arm and pulling him into his arms, Lan Wangji leaned in close as Wei Wuxian took an excited breath. Using the Gusu dialect, Lan Wangji whispered in Wei Wuxian's ear, "Wei Ying is more handsome."

"Lan Zhan!"

"... What did I just step into?" He Xuan asked a dark faced Hua Cheng.

Xie Lian was the one to answer, "Ah... it seems thoughts and... fantasies are being shown as well. An unexpected... complication."

He Xuan eyes Lan Zhan as he asks, "And who do I have to kill for laying their hands on our A-Ying?"

A-Ying? *Our A-Ying?*

"NO ONE!" shouted Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying.

Pulling Lan Wangji and Jiang Wanyin to their feet, Wei Wuxian introduced them, "He-Shushu, this is my husband, Lan Wangji. And my Shidi, Jiang Wanyin. This is Black Water Submerging Ships, He Xuan."

After nodding his head in acknowledgement of Lan Wangji and Jiang Wanyin's bows, He Xuan asks Xie Lian, "So this is THE *Lan Zhan*?" Receiving a nod in return.

The boys laugh at their red faced Senior Wei. It seems everyone he met during the 13 years he was gone knew about *His Lan Zhan*.

He Xuan points to Yu Ziyuan as he asks Jiang Wanyin, "Is she your mother?" At his nod, He Xuan continues, "Fine, I won't sink Lotus Pier since you worked hard to rebuild it. She, however, may have some trouble traveling by water from now on."

Not in the mood for fighting a losing battle, Jiang Wanyin simply bows, "Yunmeng Jiang thanks you for your generosity, your highness."

Returning to their seats, He Xuan looks at Hua Cheng, "What do you want to do with those two on the ground?"

The two looks back to the unconscious cultivators on the ground. No one has the courage to come to their aid as they were afraid to offend the Ghost Kings and the Heavenly God.

"Just leave them there." Hua Cheng said with a shrug and turned back to continue watching.

Snapping back from his imagining, Lan Wangji bit out "Boring."

Lan XiChen laughed into his sleeve thinking Lan Wangji had slipped into the Gusu dialect because Wei Wuxian flustered him. Lan Wangji jumped into a different boat to distance himself from Wei Wuxian. Ears bright red.

Wei Ying snuck a look at Lan Zhan and found he was already looking his way. Giving him a shy smile, Wei Wuxian complimented, "Your accent is very nice... I... I like it."

Lan Zhan's ears flushed red again as a small smile graces his lips.

Night has fallen in the Cloud Recesses as a black shadow lands on the roof and dashes across the rooftop in the rain. As the shadow lands on the third roof, it is blocked by white robes under an umbrella. *Shit... it's Lan Zhan!*

During the night's festivities, Wei WuXian had lost a game of dice and was sent to sneak down the mountain to buy jars of Emperor's Smile.

Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin slump low in their seats to become less conspicuous. They remembered this night as they had barely escaped punishment.

Wei Wuxian, "Lan Zhan, what a coincidence! Are you out admiring the moon too?" Except... it was pouring rain this night.

Lan Wangji, "Come to receive punishment."

Wei Wuxian pouted, "Seriously? We're so close already. Can't you spare me this one time?"

Without another word, Lan Wangji points *Bichen* and proceeds to attack.

Wei Wuxian, "Hey! There's no need for this! Its only you and I here. If we both stay quiet, no one else has to know, right? I promise! It won't happen again!"

Lan Wangji, "I don't believe you."

Wei Wuxian, "Fine.. fine... You're the one with a sword. Whatever you say goes." Wei Wuxian turns tail and jumps to the next roof.

"You!" Lan Wangji gives chase. Dodging *Bichen* time and again, Wei Wuxian pleads, "Lan Zhan, don't be so harsh! If you let me go this time, I'll owe you one!"

Lan Wangji's attacks keep coming as Wei Wuxian hops from rooftop to rooftop. To Lan Wangji's shock, Wei Wuxian abruptly turns and rams his shoulder into Lan Wangji's chest.

Gasps ring out as Lan Qiren's eyebrows began to twitch again.

The cultivators didn't know whether they should laugh or pray for Lan Wangji's sanity. Anger was once again building up inside of Yu Ziyuan. The boy's antics are bringing more shame to the sect as he carries on.

As the two barrel off the rooftop, Wei WuXian's arms and legs firmly wrap themselves around Lan Wangji's body, locking him in place. Lan Wangji stiffens in surprise and his body reacts on its own. His hand released the umbrella he was holding and his arms wrapped around Wei Wuxian's head and neck to brace for impact with the ground.

Twisting at the last moment, Wei Wuxian flipped their position so that he is underneath. Taking the full impact.

Lan Jingyi, "Did he just..."

Ouyang Zizhen, "He totally did.."

Lan Sizhui, "Please don't pull something like this Jingyi!"

Jin Ling, "That... was... AMAZING!"

After taking a second to catch his breath, Wei Wuxian rolled then over and straddled Lan Wangji. Eyes searched Lan Wangji's face as his left hand caressed Lan Wangji's cheek before it locked on his lips.

Surprised, Lan Zhan looked at Wei Ying only to smile a second later. Face bright red, Wei Ying took one look at Lan Zhan's face and proceeded to cover his face with his hands. *How mortifying!*

Snapping back to reality when Lan Wangji shifted to take his weight off of him and stood up, Wei Wuxian smirked, "Hey, Lan Zhan! Now you're out too of Cloud Recesses too. We've both broken the curfew. But don't worry, I won't tell a single soul! It'll be our secret!"

With a flick of his sleeve, Lan Wangji walked away. Taking this opportunity, Wei Wuxian hopped on the roof again and ran off. Lan Wangji stared at him from below before letting out a sigh and followed to catch the boy.

Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji have met their match when it comes to sparing and sword fights. Each time the boys fought, they drew a tie or were pulled away before a clear winner can be determined.

Jin Guangshan observed the two couples. They were opposite to each other in temperament but they also balanced each other. Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji have found a balance with themselves and their duties. Wei Wuxian, however, have the support and backing of powerful beings. One cannot find a more powerful cultivator if they tried. Jin Guangshan needed that power under his control one way or another.

Chapter End Notes

Bet you didn't see that coming... 🤣

To Give A Lan A Drink

Chapter Summary

The others arrive...

Wei Wuxian regrets giving Lan Wangji a drink.

Chapter Notes

There *may* not be an update next week (Getting my second COVID Vaccine shot... you know how fun that will be...). But I'll try ^_^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Perhaps we should take a break?" Suggested Nie Huaisang as he eyes Meng Yao on the ground.

Jiang Yanli looks at her mother on the ground, "That's probably for the best. I believe everyone needs a moment to get their bearings again."

Wei Wuxian excitedly gets up and pulls He Xuan to the table as food and drinks begin to appear. "He-shushu! You need to try Jiang Yanli's soup! Remember I told you about it?"

The others in the room looked at each other unsure: Do Ghost Kings need to eat?

Madam Jin contemplated whether or not to let her husband eat. They still needed him alive until they wrestled power away from him. "Baoshan Sanren, My Lady. Could I bother you to lift the silence spell so I can feed Sect Leader Jin?"

Baoshan Sanren gave Jin Guangshan an appraising look before warning, "If he can't keep his mouth shut and his opinions to himself, he will not leave this room in one piece."

Madam Jin chuckles as she looks to Jin Zixuan. "My Lady, we only need him alive for a little while longer."

Jin Guangshan felt the Silence Spell release right before the door slams open once again and a melodic voice fills the hall, "A-YING!!!!!! There's my favorite nephew!!!"

Three figures step through the door before closing it. A storm of white and green robes dashed down the aisle before engulfing Wei Ying within its folds. Pulling away from a very

confused Wei Ying, Shi Qingxuan looked him over and frowned, "Did you regress? You look younger than when I last saw you..."

Getting to his feet, Wei Wuxian fought back tears as he made his way to the newcomers. "Qing-shenshu."

At the familiar nickname, Shi Qingxuan whips around and stares at Wei Wuxian in shock. "A-Ying? A-Ying.... why do you look like this? What have they done to you?!?!?"

Finally unable to hold back anymore, Wei Wuxian ran into Shi Qingxuan's opened arms and broke down crying. "Qing-shenshu! Qing-shenshu... A-Ying missed you so much! I thought... I would never see you again! I wanted to introduce you to Lan Zhan and A-Yuan and A-Yi and A-Ling and A-Zhen but... I couldn't... I couldn't find you! I looked! A-Ying looked everywhere he went!"

The past cultivators and time travelers exchange concerned glances as they refocused on Wei Wuxian. They either haven't seen the man break down like this since Nightless City or have never seen him cry like his heart was being ripped out.

Shi Qingxuan chuckled as she rubbed his back, "Hush now... A-Ying. You're starting to ramble. Tell your Shenshu, who are A-Yuan, A-Yi, A-Ling, and A-Zhen?" As she made eye contact with Xie Lian, her voice took on a teasing tone as she wiped the tears from his eyes, "And which one is *your Lan Zhan*?"

The door at the back slammed open once again and in walked an older Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren. Behind them, a youth in green with a bow at his back closed the door and stepped to the side.

Within moments, the door opens once again. This time, a youth in black with a saber strapped to his side walked through while dragging an unconscious Su She on the ground, who was also unceremoniously dumped on the ground next to the others.

The cultivators stared at all the newcomers in shock. Not sure what to do, they looked to each other in confusion before deciding to leave the talking to the Great Sects per usual.

The time travelers bowed in greeting to Grandmaster Lan and Zewu-jun as the newcomers proceeded to stand beside to Xie Lian and the Ghost Kings.

Zewu-jun and Grandmaster nods to acknowledge their bows before greeting the past cultivators. Zewu-jun froze as his eyes land on Nie Mingjue. Sorrow flares in his heart to see his sworn brother alive before him.

Nie Mingjue catches the pain that flashed in Zewu-jun's eyes as it landed on him. Lan Xichen watches his future self stand before them before sharing a glance with Nie Mingjue. They couldn't believe how much he has changed. There was an air of loss and sorrow around him. The smile on his face doesn't reach his eyes anymore.

Lan Qiren's former students all gasp as they take in his clean shaven face. Female cultivators began giggling and whispered amongst themselves.

"Is that truly Lan Qiren?"

"He looks so handsome without that beard!"

"I'd marry him in a heartbeat!"

Wei Ying and Nie Huaisang exchanged conspiring looks before twin smiles broke out on their faces. Lan Qiren felt a chill run down his spine. Zewu-jun chuckled as a very uncomfortable Grandmaster Lan cleared his throat.

The Jiangs notice the Yunmeng Clarity Bells on their belts as they greet everyone. It seems Gusu Lan and Yunmeng have become very close in the future if they have a bell of their own.

Wei Wuxian turns to introduce the newcomers, his right palm facing upwards as he indicated each person, "Everyone! This is Shi Qingxuan, one of my most favorite persons in the world! Black Water Submerging Ships. The Martial God of the North, General Ming Guang and his descendant, Pei Xiu. The Martial God of the Southeast, Nan Yang Zhen Jun. The Martial God of the Southwest, General Xuan Zhen."

Little by little, Yu Ziyuan feels dread build up inside her as each Martial God is introduced. She's already offended an Immortal, the Heavenly Crown Prince, and two Ghost Kings simply by insisting on her rights as a Yunmeng Jiang leader. Who knows what else could offend these Martial Gods?

Jin Guangshan mentally shrunk back when General Ming Guang was introduced. General Ming Guang was the Martial God Lanling Jin worshipped. Their well-being and livelihoods were dependent on his favor. This just complicated his plans.

The cultivators remain shocked in their spots. As each Martial God is introduced, the boy they mocked as son of a servant and bastard child was little by little becoming someone to fear. Because their future selves decided to hang their hats with Jin Guangshan and kill Wei Wuxian, their present is now in this predicament. Their survival was now dependent on their future selves' actions as they are revealed.

"Boys, come!" Wei Wuxian excitedly waved the younger disciples to come closer. Lan Wangji following close after them.

Clapping his hands in excitement, Wei Wuxian introduced the boys. "From left to right. This is A-Zhen, Ouyang Zizhen. The Romantic and loyal one. This is A-Ling, Jin Ling. My nephew. The emotionally constipated one with a kind heart. This one is A-Yi, Lan Jingyi. My third favorite Lan. The most UnLan-like Lan and troublemaker extraordinaire. And this one! This is my little radish, A-Yuan. Lan Sizhui. Mine and Lan Zhan's son."

Shi Qingxuan gasped in excitement as she flew forward to hug Lan Sizhui. "I'm too young to have a grand nephew! But you're adorable so I'll allow it!"

Hua Cheng and Xie Lian's eyes shoot to Lan Sizhui in surprise. "A-Yuan?" Xie Lian asked with a hopeful smile on his face, "Is this the same A-Yuan you found at the Burial Mounds, Lan Wangji?"

Surprise crossed Lan Wangji's face as he replied, "Mn. How did you know?"

Xie Lian gave a sad smile as he replied, "San Lang and I were there when you arrived at the Burial Mounds and found him. We didn't know who you were nor how important you and A-Yuan were to A-Ying."

It was this moment that Pei Ming cut in. "Lan Wangji? Is this *THE Lan Zhan?*" The Martial Gods' eyes landed on Lan Wangji whose ears have now become a bright red to match Wei Wuxian's face.

Laughing at Wei Wuxian's embarrassment, Pei Ming put a hand on his shoulder. "He is as handsome as you say, Little Ghost. White jade and all."

"Its a shame that jade can't warm a bed at night." Even though the words were said low in a whisper, the Gods and Ghost Kings still heard it. Eyes narrowed on Jin Guangshan and Madam Jin pinched the bridge of her nose before berating her husband, "Will you shut up?!?! Are you trying to get us all killed? I don't care if you want to get yourself killed, don't drag Lanling Jin down with you!"

Trying to divert attention, Jiang Yanli began herding the Martial Gods to the table to eat.

Wei Ying got up to walk towards the door at the back while Lan Zhan followed behind him. Pulling open the door, Wei Ying carefully walked into a dark room. Activating a fire talisman, Wei Ying and Lan Zhan looks around the room. "It's a storage room...how did the Martial Gods walk through from somewhere else? Transportation talismans?"

Feng Xin, "Similar. We use a distance-shortening array in front of any doorway to link two points. As long as there is nothing blocking or warded against it, the array will work."

Attention caught, Wei Ying looks at the door with interest. Mind running wild with ideas, he asks, "Could you teach it to me? Or is this a Martial Gods only thing?"

Feng Xin chuckled, "I can teach it to you but you probably can make a more effective array for you."

After everyone had finished and sat back down to continue the viewing, Xie Lian complimented Jiang Yanli's cooking. "The soup was delicious! A-Ying always spoke of his Shijie's soup and I was sad to not be able to find it for him."

Jiang Yanli bowed her head in gratitude, "I'd be happy to teach you how to make it-"

"NO!!!!!" The hall shook from the loud shouts as Hua Cheng glared at his fellow Gods and Ghosts. Xie Lian only chuckled nervously.

As the confused gazes fell on him, Wei Wuxian explained, "I learned how to cook the congee from him." The mix of horror and pain that passed through the younger boys' faces said it all.

Sneaking back into his room, Wei Wuxian withdraws the jars of Emperor's from his qiankun pouch and the boys digs into the jars. Robes covered the doors and windows as noise cancelling talismans litter the walls.

Lan Qiren's eyes twitch as Grandmaster Lan reach out to stroke his beard out of habit. Letting out a sigh as he touches air.

Nie Huaisang, "Brother Wei, this liquor is really good!"

Downing his cup, Wei Wuxian sighs appreciatively, "Of course! When we are here in Gusu, we have to drink Emperor's Smile. Fragrant and mellow. Refreshing but not aggressive. Smooth and powerful."

Those who have had Emperor's Smile wholeheartedly agreed. It was the best liquor of the

Jiang Cheng rolls his eyes, "Just drink the liquor. Why make it sound like you're describing a person."

Refilling his cup, Nie Huaisang said, "Brother Jiang, I disagree. Brother Wei is making an excellent point. A wise man once said, Fine beauty is just like a great wine."

Laughing, Wei Wuxian and Nie Huaisang cheered and downed their cups.

Nie Mingjue eyes his brother, "Is this what you do instead of studying?" To which Nie Huaisang pretends he didn't hear the question.

Jiang Wanyin, "If that's true, You'll find your spouses by following the fragrance of liquor."

The younger boys share a look and burst out laughing. The rest of the time travelers hide their smiles. That statement could not be any more true.

Wei Wuxian, "As long as I have wine... I will be fine."

Jiang Wanyin, "I don't know how the Lans put up with you."

Lan Jingyi, "Hanguang-Jun lets Senior Wei get away with anything, that's how!"

Wei Ying turned wide questioning eyes to Wei Wuxian to find Lan Wangji smiling indulgently as his spouse is whining about being picked on. Lan Zhan followed Wei Ying's gaze to the couple, heart flipping in his chest. *We can have that one day.*

Wei Wuxian pouts, "Hey, I'm adorable! It's you with the problem. No one can match your standards."

Jiang Wanyin groans and covers his face drawing the curious glances of several. He forgot about that night. This is going to be mortifying.

Curious, Nie Huaisang asks, "Brother Wei, what standards?"

Eyes wide, Jiang Wanyin warns, "Wei Wuxian, don't you dare!"

Smirking into his cup, Wei Wuxian lists, "Beauty! Natural beauty."

Slamming his cup on the table, Jiang Wanyin shouts, "Hey! Wei Wuxian!"

Jiang Wanyin chased Wei Wuxian in a circle around Nie Huaisang, as Wei Wuxian continued to list off his standards,

Bursting out laughing, Wei Ying joins his depicted self on the cloth in reciting as Jiang Cheng slumps in his seat and covers his eyes.

Yu Ziyuan perks up at the prospect of hearing her son's standards for a wife. Perhaps now she can give the list to a matchmaker to find the right young lady for him.

"Virtuous and caring."

"Comes from a good family."

"Not be too chatty.

"Have a gentle voice."

"Capable but not too capable."

"Shouldn't burn through money."

Jin Ling, "Wait... that doesn't-"

Jiang Wanyin cuts him off, "Jin Ling."

He wants a wife that isn't like me. Yu Ziyuan thought. His standards in no way describes her and that makes her heart slightly uncomfortable.

"Wei Wuxian!" Jiang Wanyin pounces as the scene cuts to the door bursting open and Lan Wangji walked through.

Uh oh...

Following the yelling, He finds the three on top of one another on the bed in a questionable position. An uncomfortable feeling lances through his heart and the reaction causes him to become irritated.

"What are you guys doing?"

Breaking apart to sit properly on the bed, the three share a look before Wei Wuxian stands up.

Chuckling nervously, Wei Wuxian approached Lan Wangji, "What a happy coincidence! Why not join us for a drink since you're here already and have a chat?"

Lan Wangji, "Alcohol is forbidden at the Cloud Recesses."

"Not for Senior Wei!" laughed the boys.

A shocked Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen looked to their older counterparts for confirmation. Grandmaster Lan had closed his eyes the moment the boys had started drinking and Zewu-Jun was smiling fondly at the younger Jiang Cheng, Wei Ying, and Lan Zhan.

Reaching out with two fingers to tug on Lan Wangji's sleeve, Wei Wuxian coquettishly spoke, "Lan Zhan, don't be so rigid! We fought a Waterborne Abyss today and lived to tell the tale! Let's celebrate."

Lan Wangji looked down at his sleeve as Wei Wuxian sidled closer to him. When he looks up, their eyes meet. Wei Wuxian presses himself closer and closes his eyes as he leans in to kiss Lan Wangji. Breaking from the kiss, Wei Wuxian gives a dazed Lan Wangji a bright smile.

Lan Wangji, "You three, go receive your punishment."

Snapping back to reality to find Lan Wangji glaring at him, Wei Wuxian releases his sleeve, "Where? What chamber?"

By now the viewers are used to the sudden switches between the memories and thoughts. The newly arrived Martial Gods stared at the cloth speechless before looking at a bright red Wei Ying who was valiantly trying to bury his head under his arms.

Zewu-jun and Grandmaster Lan look to each other in confusion. *The array wasn't supposed to do that. What went wrong?*

Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang pretended to be too drunk and collapsed on the bed in a faint.

Wei Wuxian, "Lan Zhan, see? They are too drunk to walk. Why don't you sit down. Let's drink and talk! Wait! Where are you going?"

Already halfway back towards the door, Lan Wangji spoke over his shoulder. "If you refuse to come, I will ask help to drag you there."

Catching sight of Wei Wuxian pulling a talisman from his sleeve, Lan Wangji stopped when his name was shouted. Wei Wuxian slapped a talisman on Lan Wangji's shoulder as Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang rushes past pretending to throw up.

Wei Wuxian waves his hand in front of a frozen Lan Wangji before closing the door and sitting back down at the table, "Lan Zhan, come here. Sit and drink the wine."

As if in a trance, Lan Wangji walks over to the table and sat down. Wei Wuxian pours him a cup and hands it over. In one gulp, Lan Wangji downs the drink.

"WEI WUXIAN!!!!" Screamed Lan Qiren.

"How dare you use such tricks on Second Young Master Lan! Are you not satisfied with distracting my son that you have to move on to him? Are you not ashamed?!?!?!" shouted Yu Ziyuan.

"Saw the talisman and allowed Wei Ying to use it. No trick." Lan Zhan informed.

Jiang Wanyin, "A-Niang. Please sit back down."

At the request, Yu Ziyuan gapes at Jiang Wanyin. "You dare command me?!?!"

"SHUT UP AND SIT DOWN!" Hua Cheng shouts. The hall shook with the force of the vibrations and a pale faced Yu Ziyuan scrambled to sit back down.

Smiling, Wei Wuxian eagerly asks, "See? Doesn't it taste great?" He gets no response. "Lan Zhan?"

Lan Wangji suddenly pitches forward and slams his head facedown on the table.

Concerned, Lan Xichen stands as if trying to catch his brother, "Wangji!"

"Lan Zhan?" Wei Wuxian poked the back of Lan Wangji's head, causing it to tilt to the side revealing a sleeping face. Incredulous, Wei Wuxian starts to beg, "Lan Zhan? Can you please go back to your room to sleep huh? Please don't sleep here!"

Is the Second Jade of Lan... drunk? After one drink???? Laughter breaks out as people start to realize that fact. Is the Lan's alcohol tolerance really that bad?

Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan watches curiously to see what happened. They had no recollection of that night. Lan Wangji never has any memories of what happens when he is drunk and they never really spoke of it again after the Guanyin Temple.

Wei Wuxian picks Lan Wangji up from the table and helps him onto the bed. Once sure that the Second Jade was tucked into bed, Wei Wuxian went back to the low table to continue drinking.

Lan Wangji bolts upright in bed and remains sitting upright as his body sways sideways. Turning to get off the bed, he stumbles and weaves his way to the door.

Turning back from the table, Wei Wuxian notices his stumble. "Lan Zhan? What's wrong?"

As if not hearing him, Lan Wangji continues walking to the table and grabs *Bichen*. He stumbles again slightly before heading to the door. Seeing that the Second Jade was stumbling, Wei Wuxian moves to block his way. "Lan Zhan! You're still drunk. Where are you going?"

Lan Wangji turns a blank face to Wei Wuxian, "Fight."

Wei Wuxian, "Private fights are forbidden! And it's past curfew! Come on, let's go back to sleep huh?"

Wei Wuxian pulls Lan Wangji back towards the bed and convinces him to lay back down. The moment Wei Wuxian sits back down at the table, Lan Wangji sits back up again with a pout on his face and stumbles towards the table. Wei Wuxian once again

has to convince him to go lay back down. The pattern repeats several more times as Wei Wuxian becomes more and more exhausted.

"He's like a little kid wanting to play!" Said Ouyang Zizhen.

Lan Sizhui, "Maybe he just wants Senior Wei to stay next to him?"

Nie Mingjue laughs at the back and forth between Wangji and Wei Wuxian. He remembered when Xichen first drank. There was a reason why Qinghe Nie disciples were not allowed to give wine to any Lan disciple.

Finally giving up trying to sit back down at the table, Wei Wuxian lets out a breath and sat on the ground beside the bed then brought a bottle of wine to his lips. "One could never imagine, someone high and fine like you would one day follow my leads."

A mischievous look crosses his face and a sly smile graces his lips. "Second Young Master Lan, call me... Brother Wei."

"Brother Wei."

Wei Wuxian laughs as he looks at Lan Wangji's face. *Handsome even when he's drunk.* His attention is caught on the crooked forehead ribbon and reaches to straighten it.

The Martial Gods and Ghost Kings look at the cultivators in confusion as gasps rang out through the hall.

Wei Ying is debating if he should just try his luck and run through the door in the back otherwise his face may be stuck this red the rest of the time they're here.

His hand is slapped away by Lan Wangji. "What's wrong?"

Wei Wuxian, "Your headband is crooked."

It took a while for Lan Wangji to comprehend what he said. "Crooked?" He sat up to fix the ribbon.

Wei Wuxian looked on as Lan Wangji glanced upwards like he could see actually the ribbon to fix it. Mouth slightly open as he tilts the ribbon up and down.

***Cute*. Thought Wei Wuxian before he reaches for the ribbon but his hand is slapped away again, "It's still not straight, Let me help."**

Annoyed, Lan Wangji slaps Wei Wuxian's hand away a third time, "What are you doing?"

Wei Wuxian pouts, "I am just trying to help you fix it. Why are you acting like this?"

Ribbon finally straight, Lan Wangji explains, "Ribbon is sacred. No one can touch it except for parents and significant others."

oh...

Lan Jingyi and Jin Ling falls over laughing at the irony of the situation.

Wei Wuxian chokes on his wine as he cracks up at the explanation. "Significant others?"

Slightly pouting, Lan Wangji turns to Wei Wuxian, "What are you laughing at?"

Wei Wuxian, "I am laughing at you Lans. So many rules. So rigid and pretentious. No woman would marry you and live here. You're going to be alone forever at this rate."

Lan Wangji looks away from Wei Wuxian, "That's fine."

Nie Huaisang laughs, "Oh Brother Wei, It's fine because he doesn't want to marry a woman! He wants to marry you!"

Lan Wangji smiles fondly at Wei Wuxian, "Mn. Only Wei Ying."

Shi Qingxuan gasps and turns to a smiling Xie Lian, "Your highness! This means we get to plan A-Ying's wedding!"

Wei Wuxian side eyes him, "Hey, is every member of your clan that boring? If your father is as vapid as you, your mother must be so bored."

Lan Wangji, "I don't have a mother."

The hall becomes silent as the cultivators sit awkwardly in their seats. The Lans preferred to keep to themselves. No one outside of Gusu Lan really knows the story behind the Sect Leader's seclusion and it would be rude to inquire now.

Lan Zhan looks down at his hands as Lan Xichen looks his way. He's never mentioned his parents to anyone, including his brother, since he was 6.

"Tell them the truth when you get back." Grandmaster Lan tells Lan Qiren. "Not knowing will cause them more harm than it will help." Grandmaster Lan holds his younger self's gaze until the man nods in agreement.

Without thinking Wei Wuxian countered, "That's impossible. You can't be born out of thin air-"

When he finally realizes his words, Wei Wuxian glances at Lan Wangji sadly before reminiscing, "My parents died when I was four. You would think I should remember things at that age but I don't. I only remember being fighting for food and being chased by wild dogs. I don't remember how my parents looked. But I recall once I rode on a donkey with my mom. Dad was leading us with the reigns. We were laughing at a joke that my mom made when she told me 'Remember the things others do for you, not the things you do for others'.

Lan Zhan, here is to you. No, actually, here's to us. May we never forget what is worth remembering, nor remember what is best forgotten."

This explains a lot about Wei Wuxian to those that know him well. It's not that he has a terrible memory... he just chooses to not remember the things that he does for others.

Lan Qiren had believed Wei Wuxian acted the way he did because he remembered his mother and decided to act in the same manner she did. Oh how the world can become so cruel when one assumes to know another's mind.

After laying Lan Wangji back on the bed, Wei Wuxian finishes his wine and sits down on the floor beside the bed to sleep.

Time passes as day breaks across The Cloud Recesses. Wei Wuxian is awoken by banging on the door and bolts from the ground. Halfway to the door he hears a thud and turns back to the bed where Lan Wangji has rolled off and fallen on the floor.

The viewers are brought to the Yashi, where Grandmaster Lan and Zewu-jun are enjoying tea.

"Uncle, you must be exhausted from the long journey." asks Zewu-jun while pouring his uncle a cup of tea.

Grandmaster Lan, "It wasn't anything too hard. But I'm afraid things will be much harder in the near future."

Zewu-jun, "Because of the Wens?"

Nodding, Grandmaster Lan explains, "At the conference in Qinghe, all leaders were afraid to speak their minds. On the road, I've heard hundreds of complaints about how members of Wen Clan turned black into white and acted as they pleased. I also learned about the Waterborne Abyss in Caiyi Town. They've gone too far."

Zewu-jun, "The Wen Clan has many followers. We have no choice but to turn a blind eye."

It was this mindset that all the clan adopted. This was the mindset that allowed the Wens to become arrogant and willful. If someone had stood up to them in the beginning, would things have gotten to this point?

Wei Wuxian's words came back to the Sect Leader's minds. If no one spoke up, disaster will be inevitable. And disaster did come in the form of a war.

Wen Qing knows should be more worried about a war that would be waged against her clan. She's seen the atrocities that Wen Rouhan committed so she knew it was only a matter of time. Instead of feeling horrified that her uncle would die, Wen Qing felt... relieved. Relieved that his threats to her family will be gone soon.

"Master Wei." Following Wen Qionglin's gaze, Wei Wuxian sees Wen Qing in a contemplative state. Wen Ning beside her gives him a smile and small wave as Wei Wuxian

returns the gesture. *Ah, I've missed that smile.*

Wei Wuxian stood up and gave a deep bow to the Sect Leaders present. "Sect Leaders. The group of Wens that I protected were an offshoot branch based on Dafan Mountain. More specifically, Wen Qing and Wen Ning's family."

Wen Qing and Wen Ning's heads shot up at the mention of their home. Realizing what Wei Wuxian wanted to do, Wen Qionglin and Lan Sizhui joined Wei Wuxian with bows of their own.

"I ask that you grant them as well as any Wen that are proven innocent asylum and protection from prosecution. They are Healers who never had a part in the war nor would they now. After all, Healers are what wins a war."

Shaking off her shock, Wen Qing instantly got to her feet. "If my family is given protection, we will gladly provide healing assistance to the war effort."

Lan Xichen, "Any advantage we can gain over our opponents will be much needed. Gusu Lan agrees. Thank you, Young Lady Wen."

Jiang Fengmian, "We cannot blindly allow our hatred to cause more tragedies. Yunmeng Jiang agrees"

Nie Mingjue, "While I despise the Wens, I recognize that there are some who can not be blamed for their name. I do not trust you, however, I am willing to give benefit of the doubt. Qinghe Nie agrees."

Jin Guangshan, "Lanling-"

"With all the Sect Leaders present, I, Jin Zixuan, formally remove Jin Guangshan from his position as Sect Leader."

Jin Guangshan, "YOU DARE?!?! I am the Sect Leader. You have no power to remove me from my position. I will have you locked up for treason!"

Jin Zixuan, "As you all lay witness to Grandmaster Wei's testimony-"

Wei Wuxian choked on air upon being addressed as Grandmaster. The time travelers all snickered under their breath while Lan Wangji's lips twitched upwards.

" - Jin Guangshan can not be trusted nor allowed to stay in a position of power. I will take over this position with the help of my mother. My father will be confined to his quarters when we return-"

Jin Guangshan, "On what claims do you confine me? THIS IS TREASON! REBEL-MMMM MMMMM MMMM!"

Lan Wangji, "Too noisy."

Unable to hold it, Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying break out into full bellied laughter. Doubling over in their seats as Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan keeps them from falling over.

Wei Wuxian, "I keep telling everyone Lan Zhan has the best jokes. No one believes me!"

"It seems there is much work to be done at Carp Tower to vet Lanling Jin of Jin Guangshan's supporters. Any advice and help from you will be greatly appreciated as well." Jin Zixuan announced as he and his mother bowed.

Jiang Fengmian, Nie Mingjue, and Lan Xichen stood and bowed, " Congratulations, Sect Leader Jin."

Madan Jin, "Young Lady Wen, Lanling Jin agrees."

"Now that that's out of the way! Shall we return to our seats?" Wei Wuxian excitedly bounces on his heels.

Grandmaster Lan, "Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. I caught some fierce corpses to help with training our disciples. Have Wangji associate with their spirits first to fulfill any last wishes."

Zewu-jun, "Wangji is still young, yet he's excelled at Inquiry. I'll inform him"

Before they could continue, a knock sounded on the door and a disciple stepped in. "Excuse me for the interuption, Grandmaster Lan, Zewu-jun."

Zewu-jun, "Is there a issue?"

Lan disciple, "Wei Wuxian sneaked in some liquor and got drunk with a couple of students last night. He was caught this morning."

Zewu-jun smiled knowingly. This wasn't the first time Wei Wuxian has tried to sneak alcohol in but it seems to be the first successful attempt. What the Lan disciple reported next. However, shocked him. "And Second Young Master Lan was with them as well."

Zewu-jun, "Wangji was with them?"

Angered by the audacity, Grandmaster Lan slammed his tea cup on the table, "How dare they!"

Curious, Xie Lian inquired, "What's the punishment for drinking?"

Lan Qiren, "Strikes from the discipline rulers."

The scene shifts to the Ancestral Hall as Lan Wangji and the others kneel in front of Grandmaster Lan and Zewu-jun.

Lan Wangji, "Wangji is at fault. Uncle and Brother, I should be punished."

Wei Wuxian looked incredulously at Lan Wangji before cutting in, "Grand Master and Zewu-jun. It's true that we broke the rules and got drunk, but Lan Zhan's not-"

Grandmaster Lan, "Be quiet! Wei Wuxian! Your confinement punishment was not even over yet, but here you are causing trouble again. How far are you going to take this? Are you trying to ruin Cloud Recesses? Do not think that you can act however you want just because your mother is Cangse..." Realizing he's already said too much, Grandmaster Lan lets his statement drop off.

Wei Wuxian looked up hopefully at Grandmaster Lan at the mention of his mother. "Grandmaster! Did you know my mother? Grand Master-"

Grandmaster Lan, "Shut up! Wangji. Young Master Wei is not a member of the Lan clan but you are. You are fully aware of the rules!"

He Xuan, "Why tease the boy about his mother if you're not willing to speak more about it?"

Mu Qing, "Seems cruel of you to compare him to his mother but not allow him to ask further about her."

Grandmaster Lan sighed sadly as he looked between Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian, "I had not realized until today that the boy did not remember anything about his parents. I was under the assumption that he remembered and chose to behave like her. I realize now how wrong that assumption was."

Lan Wangji bows again and admits, "Wangji recognizes his mistake."

Realizing he wasn't going to get through to Grandmaster Lan, Wei Wuxian turns to Zewu-jun, "Zewu-jun! Zewu-jun... It was all my fault. I made him drink the liquor. It was against his will!"

Still adamant about receiving punishment for drinking, Lan Wangji insisted, "Wangji recognizes his mistake and accepts punishment."

Frustrated, Wei Wuxian shouts at Lan Wangji, "What is wrong with you? Why are you asking for punishment when it wasn't your choice?!"

Angered, Grandmaster Lan commanded, "Wei Ying, as the instigator, will receive three hundred strikes. Same punishment to Lan Zhan. The rest will receive 50 strikes each. Let that be a warning to the rest."

"THREE HUNDRED?!?!?!!?" shouted the younger boys.

"That... seems a bit... excessive..." Xie Lian winced.

Wei Wuxian, "Three... three hundred times?!?!? These rulers are monstrous! How am I going to survive that?!?!?"

Grandmaster Lan, "STRIKE!"

Chapter End Notes

Wei Wuxian calls Shi Qingxuan 'shenshu" because A-Ying's logic at the time was : Female Shi Qingxuan would be called 'shenshen' and male Shi Qingxuan would be 'shushu' so he just combined the two for convenience.

An Arm For An Arm

Chapter Summary

Lan elders are put on notice.

Yu Ziyuan gets a taste.

A wild Lan Yi appears.

A Smugji is spotted.

Chapter Notes

This chapter was SO SO SO satisfying to write. I can feel the satisfaction raising as I plot the other chapters. 😌

I also want to apologize in advanced to my subscribers. I decided to make some changes to my format so all the chapters will be updated before the next update.

No new materials will be added to previous chapters so you don't have to reread. Just grammatical and consistent title changes. I noticed I switched from -gonzi/-guniang to Young Master/Lady a few chapters in so they're going to all be changed to -gonzi/guniang.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The scene focuses on the robes of the Lan disciple holding the discipline ruler as he lifts the ruler to strike. Only to zoom out seconds later as a disciple whip slashes across white inner robes. Red blooms across the slash, soaking the robes.

Shocked by the sudden change in punishment, the viewers stared at the cloth in horror. The boys were supposed to only be punished with discipline rulers. How did it turn into a whip?

The cultivators flinch in sympathy at the sight. The Head Shaker froze in place as he looked up from where he had steadily and stealthily made his way over to Meng Yao. Aware of Nie Mingjue's eyes on him the entire time.

The Martial Gods and Ghost Kings got to their feet within seconds. Angry eyes landed on the Lans as Hua Cheng bit out, "WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!?!"

Silver wraiths materialized from Hua Cheng's vambraces and quickly dashed forward to attack Lan-xiansheng, Lan Qiren, Zewu-jun, and Lan Xichen.

"WAIT! STOP!!!" Wei Ying shouts before running forward to block their path as Lan Zhan stands in front of Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen. Jiang Wanyin moved to stand before Zewu-jun and Lan-xiansheng.

Wei Wuxian, "We were definitely punished with disciple rulers only. I don't know what is going on in that scene. Why don't we keep watching? Maybe it will explain things?"

The future Lans, however, knew exactly what was happening on the cloth. Lan-xiansheng closed his eyes to calm his qi. Zewu-jun tried to pull himself together while Lan Wangji grabbed his husband's hand from where they stood.

Clearing his throat, Zewu-jun begins, "I believe-"

"LAN WANGJI!"

Heads turned to Lan-xiansheng once the voice is recognized. Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen's face lost all color as they stared at the cloth in horror.

Lan Xichen, "No..."

The view zooms out further to show an older Lan Wangji kneeling before an angry Lan-xiansheng and a disheartened Zewu-jun. The Lan elders stood to one side of the hall. Many looked on with smug disapproving looks on their faces while a few had pity on theirs. A Lan elder stands behind Lan Wangji wielding the discipline whip with an anticipatory smirk.

Suddenly the resentful energy in the hall increased ten fold causing cultivators with weak golden cores to collapse from their seats to their knees.

Jiang Yanli was helped up by Jin Zixuan while Nie Huaisang is being helped up by Nie Mingjue. Wen Qionglin went to help the Wens while Jiang Wanyin helped The Head Shaker.

"Lan Zhongfen." Snarled Wei Wuxian, striking fear into the hearts of the past cultivators from the malice in his voice. They've never seen this side of Wei Wuxian. The Martial Gods exchanged glances yet remained in place. Not willing to interfere nor diffuse the situation.

Lan-xiansheng, "What is the 52nd of rule of Gusu Lan?"

"Do not befriend evil." Lan Wangji replies as the whip comes down on his back. Lan Wangji clenched his jaw to keep from crying out in pain.

Resentful energy intensified and more cultivators are brought to their knees.

The younger boys eyed Wei Wuxian with worry. Wei-qianbei's wrath was something everyone in Gusu Lan avoided at all cost. It was easy to do unless it was related to Hanguang-jun, Lan Sizhui, or those closest to him.

The last time someone insulted Hanguang-jun during a Discussion Conference, they were verbally obliterated by Wei-qianbei and that night their dreams were plagued with shadows and ghosts shrieking in their ears.

Lan-xiansheng, "You've forgotten the fundamentals of Gusu Lan. How will you have the face to greet the ancestors of the Lan Clan?"

Blood spills from Lan Wangji's lips. His eyes harden as the whips continue. "Wangji dare ask Shufu, who is right and who is wrong? What is black? What is white?"

The hall suddenly darkened around them as if someone had draped black gauze over the lights. The shadows danced and taunted but none attacked.

"Wei Ying." Lan Wangji pulls on his husband's arm to try to gain his attention but fails and the hall gets darker.

Yu Ziyuan moved to neutralize the threats but realized Zidian was no longer with her. "Jiang Wanyin, return Zidian to me."

Looking to his mother, Jiang Wanyin declined her order. "I will return it to you once this is over. If you value your life or those of your family and Sect, I would hold your tongue and not antagonize either versions of Wei Wuxian any more."

Taken aback by his outright refusal, Yu Ziyuan's anger flares to the surface. "You dare to command me, you unfilial mmmnnn mmnnnm mmmm!"

She turns her wrath on the Lans as Lan-xiansheng simply states, "If you have any self preservation, you will not forcefully break the Silencing Spell."

Yu Ziyuan glared at Lan-xiansheng as Madam Jin came to her side and pulled her to sit back down. As things progressed, she's worried that her friend will cause irreparable damage.

Angered, Lan-xiansheng shouts, "Wei Wuxian embodies everything Gusu Lan stands against. His evil deeds brought death and destruction to those around him. Still you defend him?"

The whip continues to fall as Lan Wangji fights to remain conscious. Eventually the Lan elder announces that the hits are completed and Zewu-jun looked visually relieved.

"Take Second Young Master Lan to his quarters. His core is to remain sealed and no pain relief shall be dispensed." Lan Mingshu commanded.

Elders with the same purpose as he shared satisfied smirks as they left the hall. '*I've waited years for the moment the ever perfect Lan Wangji makes a mistake. To knock him off his high pedestal. All it took was making that son of a servant an enemy of the cultivation world.'*

***'Wei Ying is good.'* runs through his mind as Lan Wangji allows the darkness to take him and the cloth turns black.**

Resentful energies did not ease up when the scene ended. The shadows howled and shrieked as they shift into black figures before Wei Wuxian. Eyes flashing red, Wei Wuxian commanded the shadows. "BRING THEM TO ME!"

The shadows moved as one to phase through the door. Taking the darkness with it and the room brightened once again.

Stomping down his anger for the time being, Lan Wangji took this opportunity to pull Wei Wuxian into his arms and kissed him. Sending the hall into a blushing mess. Feeling Wei Wuxian's tenseness ease, Lan Wangji broke away from the kiss but kept a hand on the back of his neck. "I'm here, Airen. Look at me. I'm safely by your side. We will deal with the Elders when the time comes. Come back to me."

Wei Wuxian, "They dared to plot against you. I've let things go because you asked me to Lan Zhan! But this-"

"A-Xian." Surprised eyes shot to Lan-xiansheng at the endearment. Wei Ying, Jiang Cheng, and Nie Huaisang openly gaped at Lan-xiansheng while Lan Qiren's face was fighting a battle with itself. Lan Xichen and Lan Zhan... at a loss for words. A-Xian?!?!?!

The resentful energies receded then as Wei Wuxian bowed to Grandmaster Lan. "Shufu."

Uncle?!?!?!?! Lan Xichen caught his uncle before the elder could collapse on the floor. What was their relationship like in the future if both calls each other endearingly? Something flipped in his heart at the thought of gaining a nephew in the form of Wei Wuxian.

Though anger was clearly written on both his and Zewu-jun's faces, Lan-xiansheng's voice remained calm. "Xichen and I will deal with the Elders. They have much to answer for now that we know how involved they were in facilitating these tragedies. Do not lower yourself to their level. Lan Jingyi, I expect you to keep a thorough accounting of all their transgressions"

With a smile on his face, Lan jingyi stood and bowed to Lan-xiansheng. "This disciple will be diligent, Lan-xiansheng."

"Wei Ying!"

Foreboding rips through Yu Ziyuan but she is still angry at the disrespect being shown to her.

The darkened cloth gave way to light as Zidian flashes across the scene several times. A child in purple robes is sent flying against the wall on the last whip. The child landed on the floor, body unmoving. Purple robes approached the unmoving child.

Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying physically flinched and each is respectively pulled into Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan's arms. Identical incensed glares turned on Yu Ziyuan.

Cultivators, Gods, and Ghost Kings alike turn disgusted glares towards Yu Ziyuan as well. Who else could it be that wielded Zidian so cruelly towards a child. The cultivators had seen for themselves not too long ago.

Jiang Yanli and Jiang Cheng stared at their mother in horror as Jiang Fengmian goes pale at the scene. They knew she punished Wei Wuxian more harshly than the rest but they didn't know it had started as early as this. Jiang Fengmian allowed his wife free rein to train and discipline the disciples and never really contradicted her methods. Perhaps he should have observed and interceded when necessary.

Nie Mingjue, "I believe this warrants an investigation into the treatment of Yunmeng Jiang's disciples by their leaders. Training and punishments go hand in hand and are to be expected. But what we have been shown is outright abuse."

Lan Xichen and Lan Qiren both nodded in consent to an investigation. Everything they have been witness to have been alarming. If the disciples are being abused, the Jiangs will have to answer for it.

Jin Zixuan turned to his mother in worry. Madam Yu was sworn sisters with his mother and what they decided now will affect that relationship going forward. Liu Rushi let out a sigh and nodded once to Jin Zixuan.

Even though the boy was a sore topic in her sworn sister's marriage, his treatment was appalling. They can't claim ignorance anymore. However harshly she would speak to the numerous bastards of her husband's, she has never raised a hand to any of them.

Yu Ziyuan continued to seethe. How dare these people undermine her. She has the authority over the disciples' training and punishment. Whether or not, Wei Wuxian married into Gusu Lan in the future, his younger self was still a member of Yunmeng Jiang.

She forced her lips to break the spell and rounded on Jiang Wanyin, "How dare you disregard Yunmeng Jiang's good will for taking in and raising that brat all these years!"

"San Niang..." Jiang Fengmian moves to stop his wife from gain they gained the wrath of Baoshan Sanren and the Immortal Beings.

Madam Yu, "Do you not see the trouble he brings to Yunmeng Jiang? I should have thrown him back onto the streets where he belonged instead of sending A-Cheng's puppies away!"

"A-Niang!" Jiang Cheng stood to move to his mother's side but Jiang Yanli held him back with a hand on his arm.

Yu Ziyuan lashes out on her son, "You! Always defending that ungrateful bastard-"

Laughter interrupted her, drawing her eyes to Baoshan Sanren. The Immortal returned her glare and says, "Ungrateful? Do you honestly want to argue about who was ungrateful?"

"Ungrateful is the person who disparages the child of the woman who saved their husband as well as the elder Lan brother's lives. Ungrateful is the one who harms the child of the woman who helped find healers to save her daughter's life!" Baoshan Sanren's voice got louder and louder as she got more angry. Before she could continue, the scene on the cloth caught her attention.

Yu Ziyuan sneered down at the child and shouted, "Get up!"

When the child still did not move, Yu Ziyuan picked the child up by the neck; face still hidden from the viewers. Yu Ziyuan slammed the child harshly against the wall and a loud CRACK rang through the hall. She tightened her fingers around their throat with a snarl on her face. Their left arm now broken, child claws at her hand with the right hand to free themself. But she was bigger and they were growing weaker.

"You disgusting son of a servant. How dare you come into my home and take away attention from my children. Did you think I would allow you into this family? You're nothing but a bastard with a whore of a mother. Do not call us your parents. Do not call my children your siblings. Step out of line and I will feed you to the wild dogs outside of Lotus Pier." Snarled out Yu Ziyuan.

The view then shifts to the terrified face of a young Wei Wuxian. Face devoid of all color as pure unadulterated terror flashes in his grey eyes as his face starts to turn blue.

Without warning, Yu Ziyuan is slammed against the side wall. As she tried to stand up, He Xuan slammed her head into the tiled floor. To the Jiangs' horror, he slammed her head down once more before bending down to her level.

"Does it make you feel like a powerful person when you abuse a helpless child?" He Xuan snarled in her ear. Pulling her up on her knees by the hair, he forced her to kneel on the ground as he locked her right arm behind her back.

Hua Cheng approached with a chilling smile on his face. "I've been waiting so long for a reason. And here we are."

Yu Ziyuan lets out a scream as, with the flick of his wrist, Hua Cheng broke her left arm. As he walked away from her, Hua Cheng warned, "Every injury on his body will be returned to you, human."

The Jiangs and Madam Jin run to Yu Ziyuan's side as she is released by He Xuan. Wen Qing walked over to quickly assess the damage. Deeming the injuries nothing that her golden core couldn't handle, Wen Qing pulls a length of bandage from her pack and hands it to Jiang Yanli before heading back to her seat. Her duty as healer was done, however reluctantly.

A slightly shaken Lan-xiansheng urged everyone to return to their seats. Due to the shock, cultivators automatically moved to their seats. Several cultivators, though, were still too terrified to move from their spots.

Hua Cheng whispered something into Xie Lian's ear before he and He Xuan walked back towards the door. They needed to make a small adjustment to the array.

The scene shifts to a teenage Wei Wuxian being helped out of the Lan Ancestral Hall by Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang as Zewu-jun approached them.

Nervously, Wei Wuxian asked, "Zewu-jun, did I break rules again?"

Zewu-jun had a gentle smile on his face as he looked the boys over. "You boys indeed went overboard last night. However, Shufu may have been a bit harsh and assigned a harsh punishment."

Jiang Wanyin didn't want to start trouble so he proceeded to assure Zewu-jun. "It's fine! It's fine. It's not that serious! He can walk. Wei Wuxian, stop leaning on me!"

"I *can't* walk." Wei Wuxian deadpanned as he raised his red palms that have swollen a few sizes larger.

The Martial Gods and Ghost Kings sucked in a breath. They were no strangers to rules but the punishment truly was too harsh to cause swelling of that caliber. Pei Ming tsked in displeasure.

Shock crossed Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang's faces as sympathy crosses Zewu-jun's. "It will probably take several weeks for the wounds to heal. Let me point to you a place to go to heal a bit faster."

Bowing in thanks, Wei Wuxian decided to ask, "Zewu-jun. Lan-xiansheng mentioned my mother..."

Zewu-jun, "Wei-gongzi. Cangse Sanren was classmate here with my uncle. My uncle has always strictly followed the rules. And your mother... How should I say this... you are just like her. I hope you do not hold it against my uncle. It was just that... Well, it was difficult for him to keep his beard maintained back then."

Baoshan Sanren, "Due to your own folly, Lan-xiansheng. You know what you did to warrant it."

Heart still racing, Lan-xiansheng, harrumphed. He hasn't been able to grow a beard in the last decade because of that troublemaker's son.

Eyes shining with mirth, Wei Wuxian thanked Zewu-jun for his time and headed to the Cold Pond where he finds Lan Wangji already soaking in the pond.

"Lan Zhan."

Lan Wangji's eyes sprung open to find Wei Wuxian lying on his stomach above the stones in the Cold Spring. Head tilted to the side and a big smile on his face. His peaceful cultivation shattered.

The mood slightly lightened as Nie Huaisang giggled at the long suffering look on the simulated Lan Wangji's face. Jiang Cheng also had a small smile on his face from the scene.

Lan Zhan, on the other hand, is praying his fantasies in the Cold Pond are not displayed like previously. They were more... intimate.

The scene skips to show an acclimated Wei Wuxian swimming around as he casually says, "If you come to Lotus Pier, I'll take you to eat some delicious food! I can take you to pick lotus seed pods and water chestnuts. Lan Zhan, won't you come visit?"

Lan Wangji does not spare him a glance, "No."

Now pouting, Wei Wuxian feigns hurt, "Don’t answer everything with a negative! You sound so uncaring. Girls do not like guys like that. Let me tell you... the girls in Yunmeng are very pretty, a different pretty than those in Gusu."

The ducklings groaned at Wei-qianbei's obliviousness.

Nie Huaisang, "Wei-xiong... I'm starting to feel bad for Wangji-xiong."

To that, Wei Ying nervously chuckled. Lan Zhan would forgive him... right?

Smiling knowingly, he winked at Lan Wangji, "You sure you don't want to come visit?"

All thought fled Lan Wangji's mind and he hesitated when he saw the smile on Wei Wuxian's face, but still replied, "No…"

Wei Ying, "Did you ever come visit?"

Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian shared a look before Lan Wangji answered, "Mn. The summer after the guest lectures."

Zewu-jun and Lan Xichen forced down a shiver as memories of that summer popped in their minds.

Throwing his hands on his hips, Wei Wuxian warned, "You're always rejecting me so coldly without giving me any face. What if I conveniently take away your clothes when I leave, huh?"

Having had enough of the banter, Lan Wangji shouted, "Get lost!!!"

Unbeknownst to them, a current under the surface was weaving its way towards where they were standing. Sensing a shift in the environment, Wei Wuxian looked over his shoulder. "Lan Zhan. Do you feel something strange in the area?"

As Lan Wangji turned to reply, Wei Wuxian is pulled underneath the water. Seconds later, the same current pulled Lan Wangji under as well.

Seconds later, both boys were spit out into a cave covered in ice.

Wei Wuxian, "Lan Zhan, what is this place? Why is there a swirling tunnel beneath the Cold Spring? Lan Zhan, wait up!"

Lan Wangji was already walking towards a raised platform where a white guqin rested on a ice table. It looked to be made of ice with Gusu Lan cloud motifs.

Baoshan Sanren turned sad eyes on the familiar instrument. She had it made specifically for Lan Yi the day they swore sisterhood. Though the person was no longer there, the instrument remains. Perhaps it can be gifted to their grandson, Lan Sizhui.

As Wei Wuxian approached, a blue energy slams into him and threw him back several feet. He climbed to his feet as Lan Wangji looked at the guqin as if to puzzle it out.

Several Gods reached out as if they could catch the simulated Wei Wuxian but caught themselves.

Wei Wuxian, "What was that?" As he took another step forward, the guqin released another blast of blue energy, throwing him back again.

Lan Wangji, "Assassination Chord."

Wei Wuxian, "Assassination Chord? Isn't that the secret technique of your clan? What's happening? Why is it only attacking me?"

Lan Wangji walked around the ice table to study the guqin, "Its warded against those who are not of Gusu Lan."

Wei Wuxian's eyes land on white rabbits as they hopped around. *'Every Lan wears a forehead ribbon from childhood so it recognizes its owner. How come this rabbit is wearing a Lan ribbon? Lan... recognition.'*

"Lan Zhan! The forehead ribbon! Hurry! Come give me your ribbon!"

'Wrapping my ribbon around our wrists will protect Wei Ying but I can't tie Wei Ying to me like this especially if he doesn't know the meaning.'

Deciding not to mention the significance of such an act, Lan Wangji flew to Wei Ying's side and proceeded to wrap his ribbon around both of their wrists as a third wave of blue energy attacked.

Gasping, Wei Ying turned to Lan Zhan excitedly, "LAN ZHAN!! You sly devil! You really weren't going to tell me we were married were you?!?"

Ears red, Lan Zhan nodded. "Didn't want Wei Ying to think he had no choice. To be stuck with me."

At this, Wei Ying's smile softened and he leaned over to give Lan Zhan a kiss. "I'm happy to be stuck with you."

Lan Qiren inhaled a deep breath to keep himself calm. Tensions are high now that Baoshan Sanren and the Immortal Beings are angry. They could easily decimate everyone here if one word was taken the wrong way.

The attack passed harmlessly and Wei Wuxian smiled triumphantly at Lan Wangji. Lan Wangji's heart raced as he looked at their bound wrists. A sense of contentment crashed over him.

Wei Wuxian proceeded to the white guqin and reached a hand out to touch it but is stopped by Lan Wangji. "Do not touch. Is a rare masterpiece enhanced by power. Will

attack anyone not a member of the Lans. Must belong to a Lan from the clan, an ancestor."

Baoshan Sanren, "It would have recognized A-Ying. The guqin was a gift from me when we swore sisterhood."

So Baoshan Sanren was close to Lan Yi. No wonder she knew the founders' Silencing Spell, thought Lan Qiren.

Lan Wangji stepped up to the guqin and proceeded to play Inquiry to associate with the spirit of the guqin's owner. Receiving no reply, Lan Wangji stepped away from the ice table; pulling Wei Wuxian away from it with their tied wrists in the process. A blue aura appeared before the guqin and solidified into a female Lan disciple.

Gasps escaped Lan-xiansheng and Lan Qiren. Zewu-jun and Lan Xichen's eyes widen in disbelief. When Lan Wangji had said they bowed to the spirit of Lan Yi, they hadn't believed it.

Lan Wangji, "It is her."

Confused, Wei Wuxian asked, "Who is it?"

Kneeling before the Lan ancestor, Lan Wangji kowtowed, "This one is Lan Zhan, Lan Wangji. Descendant of the Lan clan greets ancestor Lan Yi."

Wei Wuxian turned excited eyes to the ancestor. "The only female clan leader of Gusu Lan? The one who created the Assassination Chord?"

Cultivators who knew of the technique excitedly explained what it was to those sitting nearby. It was a special technique that only Gusu Lan were able to use.

Lan Wangji pulls him down to kneel as well. Bowing in respect to the ancestor, Wei Wuxian introduced himself, "This one is Wei Ying, Wei Wuxian. Disciple of Yunmeng Jiang greets ancestor, Lan Yi."

Acknowledging their bows, Lan Yi turned to pick up a rabbit that ventured close to her foot. She began to pet its head as she looked back to the boys.

Wei Wuxian, "Ancestor, these rabbits with ribbons were raised by you?"

Shaking her head, Lan Yi sighed, "They were here to accompany me. My energy is fading away throughout the years and they are too fond of play thus often come out."

"Lan Yi had pets?!?!?!" Lan Jingyi asked. Lan Sizhui was just as amazed. Looks like his father wasn't the only one circumventing the rules.

Lan Wangji, "Ancestor, texts say you have passed away. Why are you sealed here?"

A sad look crossed Lan Yi's face as she stared off in the distance. "I sealed myself away after Baoshan Sanren ascended her mountain."

Wei Wuxian's demeanor brightened when Baoshan Sanren was mentioned. "Bao... Baoshan Sanren? Ancestor, you are acquainted with Baoshan Sanren?"

Noticing Wei Wuxian's excitement, Lan Wangji looked towards him in question but for once he's ignored.

Jiang Wanyin watched with one eyebrow raised. "So you *can* ignore Lan Wangji'spresence."

"Just because I can doesn't mean that I will." Retorted Wei Wuxian before sticking his tongue out at his brother.

Lan Yi, "She was my best friend, dearest to my heart. But I... Failed her. I had always done things my own way as long as I had a clear conscience. I thought I was doing the right thing. I wanted to promote and advance the Lans mastery and heirloom. I ignored her warning. Unfortunately, at the end of the day, I was wrong."

Concerned, Wei Wuxian presses on, "What happened? Did my grandmother know you're sealed in here?

Lan Yi took a hard look at Wei Wuxian, "Your grandmother?"

Sheepishly, Wei Wuxian scratched the back of his head. "Although I was adopted by the Jiangs as a child, Cangse Sanren is my mother. Baoshan Sanren is my grandmother."

"Since I led to the trouble, she has lived in seclusion, and I was too shameful to seek her. It turns out to be so many years already. At that time, Baoshan Sanren had no disciples nor family, but now she even has a grandson who now stands in front of me. What a pity." Lan Yi said wistfully as fondness softened her features. "Since that is the case, you may address me as grandmother as well."

Lan Wangji, "Ancestor, are you the one who lead us into this place?"

"The guqin must have sensed the blood of Baoshan Sanren when A-Ying entered the Cold Pond and pulled you both in. Now that I have met my grandsons, I can feel at ease. You have my blessing and I wish you eternal happiness. A-Ying, tell her I'm sorry."

A-YING?!?!? She's already calling him A-Ying when they've just met. She really has taken him as her own grandson.

Lan Qiren now had irrefutable proof that Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian truly did have Lan Yi's blessing in their union. Zewu-jun and Lan Xichen discreetly giggled at their younger brothers' smug smile.

Baoshan Sanren's gaze fell on Yu Ziyuan. Her expression clear, *I dare you to say one word.* Yu Ziyuan remained quietly seated, face pale from pain.

Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian bowed to Lan Yi as her energy expended and she faded away.

The scene shifts as Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian crashes on the ground outside of the cold caves. Lan Wangji froze on the ground as his mind registers Wei Wuxian's body pressing down against his. He looks up and catches something flashing across Wei Wuxian's face but is passes just as quickly.

Wei Wuxian, "Lan Zhan, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to fall on you. Why are you staring at me? Do I look that handsome?"

***'Mn, beautiful.'* Catching himself before he voiced his thoughts, Lan Wangji glared and threw a laughing Wei Wuxian off himself. "Get Lost!"**

Sounds of growling interrupts Wei Wuxian's laughter; alarming the two boys.

Wei Ying, "Ah... I forgot about that..."

Wei Wuxian, "What was that sound? It sounded like fierce corpses."

Lan Wangji, "Shufu brought back some fierce corpses. Locked them up in the Mingshi. How did they get out?"

Looking back to Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian looked thoughtful. "We don't have our weapons. It's going to be tough if we get caught by them out here."

Chapter End Notes

What'd HC and HX do to the array? I think you'll love it when the time comes 😉😏

A Sly Rabbit Will Have Three Openings To Its Den

Chapter Summary

Rabbit Rescue.

A mini pig stuck on the wall.

Of lanterns and vows

Chapter Notes

I wanted to thank everyone for their continued support! Your excitement is contagious and keeps me going. I'm loving all the feedback and seeing which parts have become reader favorites!

Just a reminder, the previous chapters will be getting a minor grammatical make over. No new content will be added so you don't have to re-read... unless you want you lol.

Movement on the ground drew the attention of the viewers away from the cloth and to the figures laying on the floor.

Hua Cheng, "Look who's decided to join us."

Meng Yao was the first to regain consciousness followed by Jin Zixun and Su She. The three were confused how they got there until they remembered what happened right before they were knocked out by the unknown men.

Scanning the hall, Meng Yao's eyes landed on his father first then moved to Jin Zixuan. The older time travelers observed as longing crossed Meng Yao’s face followed by jealousy, anger, and hatred in rapid succession. It was quickly covered up with a false smile, however, when he noticed that he was being observed.

Decades of "what if" scenarios that played in Zewu-jun's mind came back to the surface. What if he had been more aware of Meng Yao's struggles? What if he had convinced him that Jin Guangshan's approval had no bearing on their brotherhood? What if he had shown Meng Yao that his father was only using him to further his agenda?

Suddenly everything seemed irrelevant in that unguarded moment Zewu-jun and the others had just witnessed. No matter what he chose to do, Meng Yao would still continue down his

destructive and deadly path. The last knot in Zewu-jun's heart finally untangled and eased from its grief.

Meng Yao stood to join Nie-zongzhu but was suddenly blocked by a fan held up against his throat.

"Huaisang!" shouted Lan Xichen as he rushed forward to assist Meng Yao. An arm holding *Liebing* halted his path. Shocked, Lan Xichen turned to question Zewu-jun but the look of deep loss and resignation on the man stopped him cold.

"N-Nie Er-gongzi? Zewu-jun?" Meng Yao asked, confused.

Not bothering to hide his anger, The Head Shaker hissed, "It took me 13 years to expose your evil deeds and bring about your demise in my time. This time, Da-ge and Xiao Huaisang will know EXACTLY what you are capable of and how far you're willing to go for that man whore father of yours! I will end your miserable life myself if you EVER plot to hurt anyone related to Qinghe Nie or Wei Wuxian again. I don't care what the circumstances are. I WILL END YOU!"

Meng Yao recoiled from the venom in the always-gentle Nie Huaisang's voice. He looked to Nie Mingjue for an explanation only to be met with his darkened angry face and Nie Huaisang's horrified one. Numbly, he replied, "I don't understand...Nie-zongzhu, Nie Er-gongzi, have I done something wrong?"

Nie Mingjue stared at Meng Yao for a moment before replying, "We've been brought here to view past and future events. It seems we've been joined by a couple people from the future and… Immortal Beings. Baoshan Sanren, Martial Gods, and Ghost Kings to be exact. It has been *quite* enlightening."

"Future?" Meng Yao whispered, mind already running through all possible scenarios that could lead to such hostility from Nie Huaisang towards him. Nie Mingjue was Nie Huaisang's bottom line. He must have unforgivably hurt them in this supposed future.

"Zixuan?" Jin Zixun got to his feet. As his eyes landed on He Xuan, however, he reached to unsheathe his sword. "YOU! How dare you attack a Lanling Jin disciple! Do you know who I am?"

He Xuan turned unimpressed eyes on Jin Zixun as Hua Cheng led Xie Lian back to their seats. The Martial Gods shook their heads at Jin Zixun's idiocy and they also returned to their seats.

"Stop, Zixun!" Jin Zixuan jumped to his feet to try to stop his cousin from attacking the Ghost King but it was too late. The cultivators flinched in sympathy when a pained scream ripped through the hall. Jin Zixun clutched his broken fingers to his chest as his sword flew from his hand and embedded itself into his shoulder with enough force to pin him to the wall.

Su She, who was standing between Meng Yao and Jin Zixun, threw his sword to the side and scrambled to the ground in fear. Crawling over to where the Lans were standing, Su She

looked to them for protection. That was when he realized there were two sets of Lans standing before him.

The older nephew and uncle duo looked down at Su She with disgust and hatred as the younger two seemed to be having a silent conversion. For a moment, a familiar indignation flared in Su She's chest. These Lans dared to look down on him just like Lan Wangji always did. One day, he will show them who is better and he will knock them down from their pedestals.

Wen Qing instinctively made to go check on the injury but is stopped at Wen Qionglin's head shake. The hatred and anger clearly etched on his face reminded the Wen siblings of what they were shown of the labor camps, that Jin Zixun was one of the guilty perpetrators. That he was the one who killed her brother. Wen Qing sat back down and resolutely ignored the man's pained cries. It was then that she swore that Jin Guangshan and his lackeys would be getting no help from her.

Lan Wangji ran up the steps as three fierce corpses gave chase. Halfway up the steps, Lan Wangji spun on the ball of his foot to break off a flowering branch. Lan Wangji infused spiritual energy into the branch before attacking a nearby fierce corpse and throwing the corpse several feet backwards. More fierce corpses replaced the beaten corpse to attack.

The incident had been forgotten in the wake of the fight between Wei Wuxian and Jin Zixuan. Lan Qiren puzzled,"How did they escape from the Mingshi?"

Lan Xichen eyed Su She before he answered, "The disciple on guard was… distracted when the corpses broke free. They spent a good amount of time looking for Wangji and Wei-gongzi after that with Jiang-gongzi."

Lan Qiren caught Lan Xichen's eye movement and asked even though he suspected what the answer was going to be, "Which disciple was it?"

Color had drained from Su She's face when he realized they were being shown things that happened in the past. He was the disciple on guard that night the fierce corpses broke free. He had spent a good portion of the night complaining to a fellow Lan disciple about Lan Wangji's arrogance and disdain for others that he had not paid attention to the Mingshi's wards.

Lan Xichen, "Su Mingshan."

Looking at the faces of the other cultivators in the hall, Su She realized they already knew what he did when they faced the Waterborne Abyss that day. That he intentionally put Wei Wuxian in danger to save himself. And now, because of a moment of distraction, he's under scrutiny again.

Deciding it was best to lay low and not draw any more attention to himself, Su She withdrew to the back seats.

“Lan Er-gongzi, your guqin!” His guqin, *Wangji,* was thrown his way. Jumping over the fierce corpses’ heads to catch his guqin. With one strum, he knocked all the fierce corpses down to be subdued.

Jiang Wanyin came up to Lan Wangji when he noticed Wei Wuxian was not with him, “Where is Wei Wuxian?”

“We got separated.” replied Lan Wangji. He had lost sight of Wei Wuxian once they were initially set upon by the fierce corpses.

Pei Ming, “Impressive... I look forward to when you join us.”

Standing, Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian bowed to Pei Ming. “Wangji and Wei Ying will not disappoint.”

Both the older and younger Lan-xiansheng and Zewu-jun observed the exchange with confusion. Were the Gods expecting Wangji and Wei-gongzi to ascend and join them? Just how much has their cultivation advanced in the recent decade?

The scene shifts to several fierce corpses chasing a white robed figure through the woods. A tree branch is broken off and hurled towards a fierce corpse, hitting it directly on the forehead and slamming it against the tree.

Moving quickly, the white robed figure weaves through the trees before quickly rounding on the fierce corpses to fight off the corpses with his bare hands. It has been hours and his energy is beginning to flag.

Nie Mingjue, “How far in the back hills did he end up?”

Jiang Cheng, “I had climbed to higher ground for a better vantage point when I heard the tree crash. We were probably a little past the waterfall.”

Nie Mingjue, “That’s quite a distance to go on foot. I’m surprised he hasn’t collapsed yet.”

"They're still alive?" pondered Wei Wuxian as he tried to catch his breath. The corpses manage to pull themselves back up and let out a loud roar before once again attacking.

Dodging the fierce corpses attacks, Wei Wuxian took stock of his situation. "I can’t kill them all without my sword…" His thoughts trailed off as his attention grabbed by the corpses once again advancing on him.

Xie Lian, “Ah… that reminds me. We haven’t finished your training A-Ying. Next time, bring your sword.”

Xie Lian and Hua Cheng’s eyes narrowed when Wei Wuxian nervously rubbed the back of his neck and gave Xie Lian a non-answer. Once again, he was deflecting when asked about his sword.

In an effort to get away, Wei Wuxian jumped up into a tall tree. Almost immediately, the corpses rocked against the tree to knock Wei Wuxian off or the tree down. A third

fierce corpse jumped over the heads of those rocking the tree to climb towards Wei Wuxian.

Lan Xichen, “Why do these fierce corpses seem to move faster than normal?”

“I’ve found fierce corpses who are under control behave more fiercely and their attack speeds doubled and sometimes tripled depending on the corpse.”

Feeling began to return to Jin Guangshan’s limbs as time went on. Although the silencing spell was lifted for him to eat, it seemed that they forgot to recast it. Jin Guangshan decided to remain silent and unmoving to better observe Wei Wuxian. With such a stiff unfeeling husband like Lan Wangji, it won’t be long before he can entice Wei Wuxian to Lanling Jin with the promise of beautiful men and whatever he desires. Any weakness shown now will be the advantage he needed to get Wei Wuxian under his control.

The aggressive shaking of the tree caused it to tilt and begin to lift from the ground. Wei Wuxian jumped off the branch just before the fierce corpse reached him and landed below the tree.

The tree finally gave way and fell over. All that the viewers saw was Wei Wuxian turning wide eyes towards the falling tree and it's shadow was fast approaching where Wei Wuxian stood.

The ground shook when the tree fell, kicking up dirt and dust.

Jiang Yanli, “A-XIAN!”

The viewers watched with dread even though Wei Wuxian was in front of them, alive and well. Lan Zhan hadn’t realized how dire Wei Wuxian’s situation was that night. They had met up in the end but aside from looking fatigued and suspiciously covered in resentful energy, he had looked fine and did not complain about any injuries.

Jiang Cheng smacked the upside of Wei Ying’s head, “You idiot! Of course you wouldn’t tell us you were injured. From now on, I’m forcing you to go to the healers after any night hunt no matter if you’re visibly hurt or not.”

The dust settled as Wei Wuxian’s vision cleared and he struggled to stand. The tree had knocked him down to the ground but was stopped from crashing to the ground by another tree. A movement near a downed tree caught Wei Wuxian’s attention. "A rabbit?"

The growling continued as the fierce corpses attacked again. Wei Wuxian made a last minute decision to scoop up the black rabbit and tucked it into the front of his robe.

Mu Qing glanced at Wei Wuxian as if he’s just figured out a grand mystery, “Why do I feel like this is an indication of things to come?”

Pei Xiu agreed, "There's definitely a pattern emerging."

Sharp claws slashed his arm as sharp teeth advanced on an already tired out Wei Wuxian. Instinctively, he threw an arm out to protect his head and block the fierce corpse's bite.

Lan Zhan fought the instinct to rush forward and block the bite for Wei Wuxian. Wei Ying's hand on his arm reminded him that this was a past memory.

Shocked grey eyes opened when no bite came nor any other attacks. The killing intent drained from the fierce corpses as wisps of resentment were pulled from it and into Wei Wuxian's outstretched arm. "Resentment?"

The black wisps twined around his arm and proceeded to latch onto his skin and attacked his body. Black veins crawled up his arms, legs, and neck as Wei Wuxian collapsed on his knee from the pain that lanced through his body.

'Again he's exposed to resentful energy while on Gusu Lan territory.' thought Lan Qiren. "Why was it only Wei Wuxian who was attacked by it again and again? It's almost as if... Was Wei Wuxian being targeted by the resentful energy?" Lan Qiren questioned out loud.

"Think of it as an army. Individually, it will have no true objective. Which is what cultivators usually deal with. Once it has something to latch onto or a stronger voice amongst them directs them, then they become tenacious in their focus." explained Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian clutched his chest as a golden orb flashed on the screen but soon it too was attacked by the resentful energies. The resentful energy surrounding him masked him and the fierce corpses simply walked past him.

Wen Qing immediately walked over to Wei Ying and wordlessly demanded his wrist to examine his golden core. Satisfied with what she saw, Wen Qing relayed, "There's a small amount of resentful energy still around his golden core but it can easily be removed with Gusu Lan's Cleansing.

Lan Zhan, "Will play for Wei Ying when we return."

Wei Wuxian could easily remove the resentful energy but who's he to come between his younger self and husband spending time together. Having expected Wei Wuxian to simply remove the resentful, Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji were surprised when he remained silent. That was… until he winked at Lan Wangji and stuck his tongue out at Jiang Wanyin.

Jiang Wanyin, "Pest."

"Wei Wuxian! Your sword!" Jiang Wanyin flew towards his shixiong and threw Wei Wuxian his sword before landing to strike at the fierce corpses.

Looking up in time to see *Suibian* embed itself in the ground before him, Wei Wuxian stared at it with uncomprehending eyes. His body was still weak from exhaustion and the attack from the resentful energies.

“Wei-qianbei! If the resentful energy were this damaging with just a small amount… how did you manage it during the Sunshot Campaign?” asked an excited Lan Jingyi.

Curious, the past cultivators and Immortal Beings witnessed the older time travelers one by one looking anywhere but at Wei Wuxian.

Arousing further suspicion, Wei Wuxian eventually deflected, “It was a war… you make do.”

Noticing his shixiong hasn’t moved to grab his sword, “What? Are you too scared to hold your sword?”

Willing some energy into his arm, Wei Wuxian reached for his sword, “Non... Nonsense.”

Finally noticing something was off with his shixiong, Jian Wanyin’s eyes focused on the wisps for black resentful energy wrapped around his wrist. “You…”

Jiang Cheng, “Didn’t you promise not to go down that path? Like that encounter wasn’t enough to-”

Lan Wangji, “Enough, Jiang Wanyin!”

Jiang Wanyin, “It wasn’t a promise he could keep if you expected him to return from the Burial Mounds. Wei Wuxian finds his own way of keeping the promises that matter the most whether you like it or not. You will come to learn there is more than one way to keep a promise and not all promises can be kept. You all need to stop blaming him for things he has no control over. And he needs to stop taking the blame for everything.”

Speechless, Jiang Fengmian looked to his wife. Though in pain, her expression showed refusal and denial. His heart sinks as he comes to the realization that no matter what was said or done, his wife may never accept Wei Wuxian even after all this is over. There is much he will need to do if he doesn’t want to lose his adopted son and the last link to Wei Changze for good.

The strums of the guqin stopped the fierce corpses in its tracks announcing the arrival of Lan Wangji. Jiang Wanyin moved to stand in front of Wei Wuxian, covering his sword hand from Lan Wangji’s line of sight.

The scene shifts to Wei Wuxian chasing after Jiang Cheng as they walk through the Cloud Recesses. "Jiang Cheng! Why are you in such a hurry?"

Jiang Wanyin shrugged his shixiong off and huffed, "Wei Wuxian. You are familiar with Lan Wangji now. Why don't you join his clan and stay here at the Cloud Recesses? Don't come back to Lotus Pier."

Jiang Wanyin huffed sarcastically as Jin Ling laughed at his uncles’ antics, “Looks like I can predict the future too.”

Jiang Cheng contemplated his words. At the time he spoke out of anger and jealousy and thought Wei Wuxian understood like he always did. *‘Was his cheerfulness all an act? Was*

this the reason why Wei Wuxian left? Because I made him feel unwanted and unappreciated?'

Wei Wuxian threw an arm around his shidi again as they continued to walk, "What's wrong with you? Lotus Cove is much better. Only the three thousand family rules would finish me off. Let's go meet up with the rest!"

Lan Wangji is seated at a desk in front of the Library Pavilion's window as he hears a creaking noise coming from the window. Within moments, Wei WuXian's beaming face popped up outside the window. Climbing the magnolia tree outside of the Library Pavilion, Wei Wuxian jumped inside. "Lan Zhan, I'm back! Did you miss me?"

"He can't miss you if you don't go away, Wei-xiong!" teased Nie Huaisang to the amusement of the younger travelers. This gained him yet another pout from Wei Ying.

Lan Wangji returned to his task of copying texts without acknowledging him. Wei WuXian deliberately took his silence for agreement, "I know, even if you don't say it, that you definitely missed me."

Lan Jingyi grimaced, "Is he trying to flirt?"

Ouyang Zizhen, "This is painful to watch…"

Pulling Wei Wuxian from the window sill, Lan Wangji pushed him up against the wall before roughly claiming his lips. Wei Wuxian's arms wrap themselves around Lan Wangji's neck to pull him closer. In one fell swoop, Lan Wangji bent down to hook his arms under Wei Wuxian's thighs and lifted him to straddle Lan Wangji's hips.

The younger boys quickly averted their eyes. They did not sign up for this…

This shift pushed their bodies closer and the friction between their groins sent pleasurable waves through their bodies. Unconsciously, Wei Wuxian wrapped his legs around Lan Wangji's waist and moaned escaped from his lips as he grinds down.

Jin Ling, "Oh my God, someone make it stop!!!"

Lan Jingyi, "Sizhui! Stop covering my eyes, I swear I wasn't looking!"

Unable to help himself, Wei Wuxian broke down laughing at his younger self's flushed face. *'This is nothing, Little Me. Just you wait… ahahahahaha.'*

"Look at you, rising to the bait already!" Wei Wuxian teased from his perch on the window sill, smashing the fantasy. "You're so easy to rile up."

Lan Wangji fought to recompose himself and focus back on what was in front of him. Angry with himself for losing focus, Lan Wangji bit out a terse, "Leave."

The hall let out a collective breath. Though no longer surprising, the sudden switches in what was real and what was fantasy was still quite jarring.

Wei Wuxian, "And if I don't leave, are you going to throw me down?"

The fantasy popped back into Lan Wangji's mind at the other's accurate taunting. Wei Wuxian appeared to have read something on Lan Wangji's face when he added, "Don't look like that! I'm here to apologize with a present!"

Feng Xin, "I'd be weary of presents from you, A-Ying…"

Shi Qingxuan, "Only if your name is Lan Wangji, Nan Yang."

Needing the boy to leave him alone, Lan Wangji refused without thinking twice, "No."

Wei WuXian reached into his robe and pulled out two rabbits, one black and one white, to present to Lan Wangji, "Are you sure?"

Seeing the spark of interest in Lan Wangji's eyes, Wei Wuxian explained, "I found the black one last night in the backwoods and it reminded me of the rabbits in the Cold Cave. I went back there and freed all the rabbits there and kept this one. I even left the forehead ribbon on! What do you think? Do you want them?"

Four sets of wide eyes focused on Wei Wuxian in surprise. The rabbits?

Lan Sizhui, "The rabbits were originally from you?"

Lan Jingyi, "Things make sense now…"

Lan-xiansheng and Lan Qiren's eyebrows twitched. *'So that's where those rabbits came from.'*

Lan WangJi still stared at him without any reaction and turned to walk towards the window to hide his red ears.

Wei Wuxian, "If you don't want them, I'm gonna give them to someone else."

As if someone had told him they were taking away his guqin, Lan Wangji quickly said, "Stop. Who are you giving them to?"

Wei Wuxian turned around and raised an eyebrow when Lan Wangji asked "I'll give them to whoever's good at roasting rabbit meat."

Lan Jingyi, "What is with you and threatening to roast those rabbits!"

Wei Wuxian shrugged, "I caught them… so I can roast them if I wanted to. Not that I will, Lan Zhan!"

Lan Wangji, "Mn."

Lan Wangji, "Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses."

At that, Wei Wuxian replied, "Fine. I'll kill it outside and then bring it back to roast it. You don't want it, anyway, so why do you care about it?"

Lan Jingyi chuckled at Wei-qianbei's words, "Well… that's one way to circumvent the rules. I can find no fault in that. And since you're a guest disciple, you're not expected to abstain from eating meat. The perfect solution."

Lan Sizhui, "Please don't try it, Jingyi..."

Lan WangJi took a breath and bit out, "Give. It. To. me."

***'You never say what you really want. So I'll do it for you.'* Wei WuXian grinned on the windowsill, "Now you want them? You're always like this."**

Lan Xichen smiled at the idea of someone other than him being able to read his little brother. He was right about Wei-gongzi being a good choice for his brother to become friends with. He did not expect it to develop into something more serious but so long as Wangji is happy. That's all that matters.

Wei Wuxian pulled out a piece of lettuce to give to the rabbits. As the two rabbits played with each other, they began to wrestle with each other. The white rabbit finally pinned the black rabbit to the ground. "Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan! Look at how one is on top of the other…"

Freezing in the middle cleaning up the ink smears caused by the rabbits, Lan WangJi commented, "They are both males."

After checking for himself, Wei Wuxian put the rabbits back down, "They really are male. I didn't even finish what I was saying. What were you thinking about? I'm the one that caught them and didn't even notice. Where were you looking-"

Laughter rang out throughout the Library Pavillion as Lan WangJi finally threw Wei Wuxian out of the window and slammed it shut.

Jiang Cheng, "How does Yunmeng still have any face with a Head Disciple like him?!?!?"

Wei Wuxian feigned offense, "Hey! I'm a catch! Right, Lan Zhan?"

Lan Zhan, "Mn. Perfect."

"Lan Zhan!!! Think of my poor heart!" cried Wei Wuxian as he nuzzled Lan Wangji's chest.

Disciples gathered on a hilltop overlooking the back hill's waterfall. Zewu-jun and Lan-xiansheng oversaw the yearly ritual as disciples made their lanterns in groups.

Xie Lian, "Lanterns?"

Zewu-jun, "It was a tradition for the disciples to make and release blessing lanterns during the Mid-Autumn Festival each year."

Lan Xichen, "Was?"

Lan-xiansheng, " The Cloud Recesses postponed guest lectures after… events... that occurred after A-Xian was resurrected. Xichen entered seclusion to mourn and reflect. I… I was set in my ways and together with the Elders, refused to acknowledge Wangji and A-Xian's marriage. So Wangji seceded from the Sect to travel the world with A-Xian and the role of Acting Sect Leader fell on me once again. Wangji refused to allow any disrespect to be shown to his spouse by Gusu Lan or anyone in the Cultivation world. When they offered him the role of Xiandu, Wangji said he would only accept if every Sect apologized for the injustices they forced upon A-Xian. He only returned to the Cloud Recesses after the Elders apologized for their role in Jin Guangyao's schemes."

Shocked at the extent Lan Wangji would go to for his spouse, decisions and plans had to be reevaluated.

Wei Wuxian ran up to Lan Wangji excitedly, “Lan Zhan! Let’s set a lantern together to make a wish! We’ve shared so many life or death experiences already!”

Lan Wangji took a step away from Wei Wuxian and turned away, “I'm used to being alone.”

Pouting, Wei Wuxian whined, “You can change your habit! My lantern is especially made for you. Look!”

Wei Wuxian holds out the lantern that he had painted a rabbit on. Something in his heart warmed as Lan Wangji looked at the rabbit drawn by Wei Wuxian and a small smile crossed his face.

Whispering to each other, the younger boys conferred, "This explains so much. That rabbit lantern Hanguang-jun gave Sizhui after Yi Cheng must have meant something too!"

Lan Jingyi, "Was that when they confessed?"

Jin Ling shivered at the memory of that night at the Guanyin Temple. "No… they confessed at the Guanyin Temple before I got dragged there. They were still just as shameless as back then… urghh."

Wei Wuxian took in the small smile as his heart did a flip and he nervously chuckled, “You smiled.” Wei Wuxian fought the urge to reach out and stroke Lan Wangji's cheek. ***'What will it take for you to smile like that at me?'***

One by one, the disciples released their lanterns and made a wish.

Nie Huaisang, “I wish I can graduate successfully and don't have to come back here again.”

Nie Mingjue raised an eyebrow at his brother. "And did you pass?"

Lan Xichen laughed into his sleeve as Nie Huaisang and the Head Shaker covered their faces with their fans. "Whether or not you passed Gusu Lan’s Guest Lectures became insignificant in the face of war, Da-ge."

For a moment, Nie Mingjue had forgotten that his brother was also a victim of war. Whether or not his experiences were different from those on the front line, it still had a tremendous effect on him. Life's hardships have changed his little brother. Now that Huaisang is the hardened version that he's always pushed his brother to become, he's not sure he likes it.

Wei Wuxian, "I, Wei Wuxian, wish I can always stand with justice and live with no regrets."

Lan Wangji stared at Wei Wuxian in awe as he made his wish. As if something finally made sense in his mind, Lan Wangji made his wish as well.

'I, Lan Wangji, wish I can always stand with justice and live with no regrets."

Xie Lian, "Gusu Lan puts emphasis on education and the pursuit of knowledge. Do you pray to Ling Wen Zhen Jun?"

Lan Qiren, "We do, Your Highness. Along with General Tai Hua."

Xie Lian, "Oh? I do believe they may be joining us after they complete their own tasks. General Tai Hua has been asking after A-Ying recently."

WHAT?!?!? More Martial Gods? Just exactly what kind of person is this Wei Wuxian?!?!?!?!

The Cultivation World of the past slowly felt the fingers of doom closing around them.

How to Survive in the Cloud Recesses

Chapter Summary

Wei Ying is clued in.

How to bend rules like a pro.

Which one is the bride?

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay in updating. The driveway and I had a disagreement and I lost ahahaha

Hopefully I'll have the next chapter up by the end of the week =)

Smiling at the scene, Wei Wuxian gives his husband a kiss before walking over to Wei Ying. “Little me, let’s have a talk.”

Wei Ying gets from his seat and bounces over to where Wei Wuxian stood, “Ok! How did you get the compass to work? Is it the same basis as the lure flags?”

Wei Wuxian doesn’t answer until they’re far away enough from where the rest can hear. “Wei Ying. There are some things I need to show you before it’s shown to everyone. You need to be prepared and have your emotions sorted out before that happens.”

Taken back by Wei Wuxian’s serious tone, Wei Ying nods. “What do I need to do?”

Wei Wuxian, “We’re going to perform Empathy.”

At the front, cultivators watched as He Xuan walked to the table where food once again appeared and began to eat. Deciding to not upset the Ghost King by getting food for themselves, they forced their attention back to the cloth and resumed watching.

Lan-xiansheng is shown sitting at a stone table underneath a magnolia tree in the early morning. Elegant fingers filter across a white porcelain tea set. Pouring himself a cup of tea, Lan-xiansheng contemplates the past few days. Since the incident with the fierce corpses, Wei Wuxian has been quiet. Almost rule-abiding.

A Lan disciple bowed as he approached, "Lan-xiansheng."

Lan-xiansheng, “Wei Wuxian must be up to something again. Go and investigate it.”

Jiang Cheng and Nie Huaisang hunched over laughing alongside the younger boys as amusement filled the hall.

Wen Qing, "From what we've seen, I'd be suspicious too if Wei Wuxian suddenly started following the rules."

The Lan disciple proceeded to bow again, however, the sound of fabric ripping filled the hall. Lan-xiansheng eyes the wide-eyed and red-faced disciple suspiciously as he nervously backs away with his hands hidden behind his back.

A pained cry drew attention to where Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying sat across from each other.

Jiang Cheng, “What is he doing?!?”

Before he could finish asking, Jin Ling had already shot towards the back while removing his Jiang bell from his belt. Lan Wangji made his way towards the two before he answered, “Empathy.”

Wen Qing is on her feet in no time at that answer. Empathy is draining on one’s spiritual energy. Wei Wuxian may have an impossibly large amount of spiritual energy but Wei Ying does not.

All eyes are on Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying as they pull out of Empathy. Wei Ying flinches as Wen Qing grabs his wrist to check his spiritual energy but quickly apologizes. “He’s going to need a minute to get his bearings again.” Wei Wuxian informed them as he held a hand out to Wei Ying. “Let’s return to our seats. You’ll probably be seeing what I’ve shown him later on anyways so there's no need to question him further."

Curious eyes follow Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying back to their seats. No one has ever attempted to perform Empathy and here these two are, just jumping into it at the back of a hall full of people.

The lighting changed as the afternoon light settled throughout the forest. The calmness of nature settles over the viewers. As they admired the serene forest, a flash of white darts silently across the scene.

Switching views again, the viewers are shown the back of a Lan cultivator as he watches Wei Wuxian walk out from between the trees. A pheasant hanging from his sword that was swung over his shoulder, he had a big smile on his face as he whistled a Yunmeng drinking song.

Those from Yunmeng and the areas nearby recognized the song and chuckled at the bawdy song.

Wei Wuxian suddenly looked up as if he finally sensed the presence of another. Alert gave way to surprise and then to excitement as Wei Wuxian smiled brightly in recognition. "Lan Zhan!"

"Killing is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses." Came the displeased reply.

A sense of loss flooded Wei Wuxian at his tone. Jiang Cheng's words from earlier in the day flashed through Wei Wuxian's mind. ' ***You've gone and offended Lan Wangji. He definitely hates you now, Wei Wuxian!'***

Lan Zhan looked to Wei Ying as he caught the other looking down at his feet. Eyebrows furrowed as if puzzling out a dilemma.

Putting on a brave front, Wei Wuxian smirked and flicked his head towards the stone marker used to mark the border between the lands. The marker stood between them and it read:

The Cloud Recesses

Wei Wuxian was outside the borders of the Cloud Recesses. Lan Wangji let out a sigh as Wei Wuxian walked back towards the forest, humming another drinking song.

Nie Mingjue laughed, "Well… he's not wrong."

Feng Xin chuckled, "He was always finding loopholes in our rules for him."

Hua Cheng huffed in amusement while Xie Lian laughed, "We once told him he could only go where we could see him and he ran off a little while later. When San Lang finally found him, A-Ying said 'I had A-Die's butterfly on me so he could see me through that!.' So technically he did exactly as we said no matter where he went."

Jiang Fengmian felt a twinge of bitterness as he listened to the Heavenly God's story. *'A-Xian called him A-Die. But I was always Jiang-shushu to him.'*

Lan-xiansheng and Zewu-jun walked down the steps of the Cloud Recesses as they intended to check on the progress of the Waterborne Abyss suppression. On their way down, several Lan disciples and guest disciples were struggling to make their way up the steps. The guest disciples' struggles were understandable as they are not used to the large set of steps. But the Lan disciples… it should have been second nature for them to climb these steps.

The disciples greet Lan-xiansheng and Zewu-jun as they pass them on the steps. As they straightened from their bows and continued their ascent with seemingly renewed energy, Zewu-jun noticed a few of the disciples looked to have gotten plumper in the face. ***'Odd.'***

Those who attended Gusu Lan's lecture with Wei Wuxian shared knowing looks. They would not have survived all of the Lans' meals without him.

Lan Wangji is on night patrol again as a movement catches his attention. He turns towards where the figure was creeping along the ground before jumping up onto the roof. "Wei Ying. Do not sneak out by climbing over the wall in the Cloud Recesses."

Nie Huaisang, "Uh oh, someone's in trouble…"

Jiang Cheng, “Busted.”

Wei Wuxian looked back at Lan Wangji from the roof with a mischievous smile. "Lan Zhan! I didn't climb over the wall-"

The view zooms out to show the rest of the wall and the door Wei Wuxian was currently standing above.

"...I climbed over the door." Wei Wuxian finished.

The boys are laughing so hard that they have hunched over in their seats. Their laughter is joined by the Nies as well as the Immortal Beings.

Lan Jingyi, “Wei-qianbei! Oh my god, you’re amazing!”

“...climbed over… the door…” Ouyang Zizhen gasped out in between laughs.

Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen’s eyes widen when they notice Lan-xiansheng’s lips slightly twitched upwards. Now more curious about their close relationship than ever, Lan Qiren makes a note to speak with his counterpart when possible.

Lan Wangji let out a resigned sigh. As Wei Wuxian's laughter floated to where he stood, his heart felt lighter. He turned and continued his patrol. Landing on the other side of the wall, Wei Wuxian turned back to watch Lan Wangji walking away with a sad smile.

Unease settles into their bones the more Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan watch. As they are being shown these scenes, Lan Zhan began to worry that his behavior towards Wei Ying when they had first met had caused a misunderstanding. Even though Lan Wangji has spent the past decade showing Wei Ying how much he is loved, there were still moments where Wei Ying would pull away from everyone. Could this shed some light on why?

The next afternoon, Lan Wangji steadily made his way to the kitchens. Earlier one of the kitchen staff mentioned Wei Wuxian had come by to bring lunch in his room but he had grabbed an entire pot of rice when he did so.

Having received no answer to his knock, Lan Wangji opened the door to Wei Wuxian's room. Wei Wuxian's back was to him as he ate. The pot of rice sat empty by his side.

"Wei Ying. Do not eat more than three bowls of rice in the Could Recesses. You got too much rice."

Lan Sizhui smiles as Lan Jingyi snickers to his friends, “Hanguang-jun allows Wei-qianbei to eat as much as he wants.”

Wei Wuxian paused while eating as he turned around to look at Lan Wangji with wide innocent eyes. Chopsticks still held up to his mouth. His cheeks were puffed up with rice like a chipmunk storing food. The sight made Lan Wangji's heart melt and his ears turn red. *'Cute.'*

Swallowing his food, Wei Wuxian pouted, "I didn't, Lan Zhan. It's just my first bowl of rice!"

Jiang Wanyin once again pinched the bridge of his nose. “Why do you act like this? How does Lan Wangji even deal with you?”

“Because I’m adorable!” retorted Wei Wuxian. Jiang Cheng and Nie Huaisang pretend to vomit at the reply.

He turned fully to show Lan Wangji his "bowl" of rice. Lan Wangji's eyebrows twitched before he pulled Wei Wuxian out of his room.

Jin Ling, "Is that a serving bowl from the kitchen?!?!?"

Lan Jingyi, "Holy shit!"

Lan Sizhui, "Jingyi!"

Lan jingyi, "Sorry Sizhui! But... if you think about it. The rules never stated what *size* bowls were allowed. It's brilliant!"

The boys continue to debate the rules as Lan Wangji looks on. His eyes softened as Sizhui laughs at something Jingyi had said. This was the future he fought for. His son and his friends, carefree and unburdened. Uncaring of Sect or status.

"Lan Wangji."

Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan turned their heads towards the voice. Immediately gaining their feet, they bowed and waited for instructions from the Immortal.

"As Lan Yi had accepted A-Ying into the Lan family, I accept you into ours. Welcome to the family." Baoshan Sanren declared as her disapproving eyes landed on Yu Ziyuan. “You have the approval of your Familial Ancestors, no one can forsake or refute your union.”

Jiang Fengmian solemnly nodded his head in acceptance. As Wei Wuxian’s maternal grandmother, her words held more weight than his or his wife's.

As Baoshan Sanren's eyes landed on Lan Qiren, he nodded in acceptance as well. The words of an Elder Ancestor will always take precedence over the current Leaders and Elders.

Happiness burst in Lan Zhan's chest as he met the eyes of an equally happy Wei Ying.

Wei Wuxian found himself once again copying texts in the Library Pavilion. He sat across from Lan Wangji, plotting, while he and Lan Wangji ate lunch. *'If wasn't for the stupid Peacock and his dog, Lan Zhan wouldn't have found my Emperor’s Smile! Pets aren't allowed in the Cloud Recesses!"*

Jin Ling looked at his dad in excitement, “You had a dog? I never knew!”

Jin Zixuan takes note that his dogs were gone by the time Jin Ling was old enough to know the difference, “I actually had several. The one Wei Wuxian was talking about is named Blossom.”

“Blossom?” Lan Jingyi whispered to Lan Sizhui and Ouyang Zizhen. “I see where Jin Ling got his naming sense.”

Wei Ying bursts out laughing. “Oh… this makes so much sense! Jiang Cheng...Jin Ling inherited his naming sense from both you and the Peacock.”

Jiang Cheng scowled, “Says the guy who named his sword *Suibian* .”

Wei Ying, still laughing, says, “Technically… Jiang shu-shu did!”

Lan Wangji, "Wei Ying, focus on eating."

Wei Wuxian looked down at the dishes on the table and whined, "I will focus on eating, but can't we eat something else? These are plain and tasteless."

The clinking sound of ceramic rolling on wood pulled Lan Wangji's attention to the floor. A dark jar rolled past him and stopped at Wei Wuxian's knee. Lan Wangji turns to check the window behind him when Wei Wuxian gasps and holds up a jar with stars in his eyes. "Lao Gan Ma!!!" And proceeds to pour four spoonfuls onto his rice. "There's no rule that says spicy food is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses! Lan Zhan, do you want some too?"

Shudders run through the boys as they flashback to eating bright red congee.

Cultivators gape at the amount of chili being piled onto the bowl of rice. That much would burn any taste buds in their mouths. Who can even eat that much spice?!?!

Lan Wangji warily eyed the bright red bowl of rice with trepidation, "No."

Wei Wuxian poured a spoonful over the rice in Lan Wangji’s bowl, "Try some! Don't stand on ceremony!"

Lan Wangji, "No."

Never one to give up, Wei Wuxian tried a new tactic. "It is chili that brings us together! The first requirement for marrying... someone… girls... from Yunmeng is being able to eat spicy food."

Nie Huaisang sighs, “Wei-xiong… I really do feel bad for Wangji-xiong.”

Lan Wangji looked up from his bowl of rice to look at Wei Wuxian. Trying to decipher if he's speaking the truth.

***'Ah… that got his attention."* Ignoring the sudden ache in his heart, Wei Wuxian prepared to push forward but was stopped when Lan Wangji picked up his spoon and scooped a spoonful into his mouth. "You... you really ate it. I was just kidding. You…"**

The ache in his heart grew more intense as he watched Lan Wangji continue to eat his rice until everything was gone. "Is... there someone you like in Yunmeng? What's her name? Which clan is she from? I'll ask about her."

Lan Wangji pushed through the burning in his mouth, "Wei Ying."

Shoving his feelings to the side, Wei Wuxian replied, "I know, I know. You're being shy. Don't worry. I won't tell anyone."

Groans fill the hall as Wei Ying flushes red. “That wasn’t what you meant was it…?”

Lan Zhan’s ears turn bright red and he grabs Wei Ying’s hand, “Mn.”

The scene zooms outside the window to show Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang crouching below the window outside. Having done their part to deliver the chili sauce, the two tiptoed away.

"You will still hold a wedding ceremony." Hua Cheng demanded from his seat. "A-Ying deserves more than a simple hand-fasting in an ice cave."

Smiling at his side, Xie Lian clasped his hands before him, "I've always imagined the day we would see our little A-Ying dressed in red." Looking towards the back, he added, "Restrictions will be lifted so that the Heavenly Officials can attend A-Ying's wedding."

"I will send out the communications, Taizi Dianxia." A female voice replied. Attention turned to the back where a female dressed in simple black robes had stepped through the door carrying a scroll.

Pei Ming, “What took so long, Ling Wen Zhen Jun?”

Ling Wen Zhen Jun?!?!?! The Number One Civil God? Excitement built as the cultivators stood to greet the Civil God. Confusion quickly spreads when no one else stepped through the door.

"Where's Ling Wen Zhen Jun?"

"I thought General Ming Guang just addressed him?"

Disgust showed in Ling Wen's eyes as she walked past the Jiangs and Jins. Her eyes land on Jin Guangshan and she scoffs. The man's eyes were roaming her body appreciatively. Feeling spiteful, Ling Wen shifted to her male form. Pei Ming and Ling Wen shared a smirk at Jin Guangshan's horrified confusion. Realization dawned on the cultivators as they openly gaped at the Goddess they've been worshipping as a God.

Ling Wen continued her path to the front after pausing to hand Jin Zixuan, who had scrambled to his feet and looked on with confusion, a scroll. She stopped before Wei Ying and reached out to hand him a wrapped package, doing the same with Wei Wuxian.

A pleased gasp escaped Wei Ying's lips as he opened the package. "Lotus seeds! Thank you, Goddess… God… your… highness…?"

The Heavenly Officials chuckled at Wei Ying's confusion when a soft "Ling-shushen." drew all eyes to Wei Wuxian. He was looking down at the lotus seeds in his hands with a soft sad smile on his lips. "Are these…?"

The cultivators looked on as Baoshan Sanren, the Heavenly Officials, and Ghost Kings' faces softened and became fond as they looked at Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying. They sucked in a breath at the overwhelming outpouring of love in that moment. Xie Lian spoke up, “They bloomed not too long after we planted them. This is the first time we’ve harvested them, however. It didn’t feel right to enjoy them without you.”

Realization flashes in Wei Ying’s eyes and his smile drops. He continued to eat the seeds absentmindedly but that makes Lan Zhan look at him worriedly.

A knock on the door pulled Lan Qiren from his meditation. Having received permission, Lan Xichen entered the Yashi to greet his uncle. Once seated, he pulled a book out from his sleeves and handed it over to his uncle.

Lan Qiren, "How to Survive in the Cloud Recesses?"

Lan Qiren's face got redder and redder as he flipped through the book.

“We need to find that book, Sizhui!” Lan Jingyi whisper-yelled.

"WEI YING!!!!!!!!!"

All over Cloud Recesses, Lan Qiren's angry yell could be heard. Even from the back hills where Wei Wuxian and Nie Huaisang were fishing in the lake.

Nie Huaisang broke down laughing from where he had fallen in the water, "Wei-xiong, you've done it now! Now both Lan Qiren and Lan Wangji hate you!"

"I can’t help it if they're a bunch of sticks in the mud!" laughed Wei Wuxian. Though the laughter did not reach his eyes.

“You wrote a book? On how to circumvent Gusu Lan’s rules?” Nie Mingjue breaks down laughing. “Genius! I like you, kid!” Nie Huaisang and the Head Shaker beam up at him like he said they could buy more brushes and paint for the month.

Shi Qingxuan excitedly announced, "Leave the wedding planning to Jiang-guniang and I!" Pei Ming and Ling Wen rolled their eyes at the former Wind Master’s enthusiastic cry before flushing at her next questions . “But… which one is the bride?”

Lan-xiansheng clears his throat before smirking, “Wei Wuxian’s inventions and talismans have brought in more than enough profit in our time. Enough to pay any dowry ten times over. Gusu Lan will not need a dowry.”

Oh... that answers that question. The Lans gaped at Lan-xiansheng. Did he… did he just…in front of everyone??!?!

“Shufu!” Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying flush red as Lan Zhan’s ears match their faces. Zewu-jun hides a smile at Lan Wangji’s smugness. The Heavenly Officials and Ghost Kings’ eyebrows and faces twitch at the insinuation. *‘A-Ying… our little A-Ying…’*

Nie Mingjue could no longer hold back his laughter and full bellied laughter cuts through the hall as the image on the cloth changes.

The punch heard throughout Yunmeng

Chapter Summary

Jin Zixuan sweats bullets

One, two, punch.

Ant hills are for masterpieces.

Chapter Notes

Uh oh... someone’s in trouble!

This one's a longer chapter than usual 😄

White robed disciples walked along a long wall as Lan-xiansheng's voice droned on reciting the story of Lan An and his soulmate.

Giggling, Wei Wuxian studied one of many panels on the wall as he spoke, “So, the Lans' ancestor was a monk? Now all the rules make sense… how could a person like him produce such unromantic descendants?”

Wei Wuxian laughed, "Little did I know how romantic they really are! Right, Shidi?"

"Shut up!" Jiang Wanyin hissed under his breath. The time travelers chuckled at the flustered man as Jiang Cheng caught the smile he was trying to hide. *'Did I fall for a Lan as well?'*

A group of Jin disciples stood before the panel depicting Lan An. "I wonder how exceptional 'The One' really was… We're not short on beautiful women right now!"

"Mei Feng was a beauty in her own right. A little quiet though…" mused Pei Ming out loud. It was a moment before he noticed the others getting quiet and looked back. "What?"

"Lao Pei… please tell me you didn't have a thing with the Lan ancestor's wife." Ling Wen inquired as she pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Of course not! She had already met Lan An." Pei Ming replied before adding, “I had a thing with her sister.” Shocking the cultivators as the Heavenly Officials rolled their eyes.

The Jin disciple standing next to Jin Zixuan turned to him and asked, "Jin-gongzi, who do you think looks best?"

Jin ZiXuan's heart stopped and color drained from his face as the memory of that day flooded him.

Walking past the group, Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin happened to hear the conversation.

"Do you even need to ask? He's engaged. So of course he would have to pick his fiance."

"He is? Who is this lady? She must be extraordinary!"

A small smile graced Jiang Yanli's face as she watched.

Looking over to Jiang Cheng and Wei Ying, Jin Zixuan's palms began to sweat. Their faces were darkened with anger and their hands were fisted in their laps. *'I guess they're still mad…'*

Liu Rushi frowned at her son's reaction to the scene but her attention was pulled to the cloth before she could ask him what was wrong.

Fed up with the gossiping, Jin Zixuan spoke up, "Drop it."

The smile dropped from Jiang Yanli's face and Jin Ling's eyebrows furrowed in confusion. *'I thought my parents loved each other before they got married.'*

"What do you mean 'drop it'? Are you not happy with your engagement to my Shijie?"

Turning around to where the angry voice came from, the group was met with the sight of a very angry Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian. The ever present smile on Wei Wuxian's face was replaced with a furious scowl.

Shivers ran through the boys as they watched. Wei-qianbei never gets angry unless someone he loves is hurt or insulted. The times that he does get angry, it's never pretty for the offenders.

Whispers break out as disciples begin to realize the situation.

"It's that plain girl, Jiang Yanli?"

"No wonder Jin Zixuan…"

"What a shame!"

"I hear her cultivation is as low as a child's"

“I heard it was arranged from birth and not by choice!”

Jiang Fengmian frowned. The boys had refused to elaborate on what happened with the Jin heir even with the threat of punishment. It seems they'll be shown the reason for Wei Ying's actions that day.

Jiang Yanli shifted her gaze to the floor. This wasn't new to her. She knows what others say about her when they think she can't hear them. Throughout the years she had built a mask of false cheer whenever needed. To show that their words did not bother her. To pretend to be the docile and ignorant girl they believe her to be.

"WHO THE HELL DO THEY THINK THEY ARE?!?!" Jin Ling shot to his feet. His body shook with barely restrained anger. Ouyang Zizhen pulled his friend back into his seat as he glared at the disciples in the scene. "They don't even know her!"

"Is there anything about her that can make me happy?" Jin Zixuan looked down his nose at them.

Yu Ziyuan and Liu Rushi's furious eyes snapped towards Jin Zixuan as Jin Ling glared at his father. Tears pooled in Jiang Yanli’s eyes; her suspicions about the cause of the fight confirmed.

"I don't understand." All eyes turned towards a scowling Jin Ling. "I thought you were in love. I grew up being told that my parents were so in love. That they couldn't wait to get married. But… you... you just disregarded her in front of everyone. I can't even imagine doing something like that to someone I loved."

Jin Zixuan's heart flipped as warmth bloomed in his chest. *'We were in love? Were they lying to comfort his son as he grew up?'*

Sighing, Wei Wuxian stood to kneel before Jin Ling. "Your parents… they had a rough start in their relationship. It was an arranged marriage and their only examples of marriage were your grandparents' marriages. You can see how things are."

Joining Wei Wuxian at his side, Jiang Wanyin put a hand on Jin Ling's shoulder. "Your father had his fair share of idiotic moments and your Da-jiu put him in his place as you will probably be seeing. When all is said and done, your parents were madly in love and they love you just as much. Do not doubt that."

Still frowning, Jin Ling snuck a look at his parents. His father was lost in thought while his mother stared at the cloth in front with tears in her eyes.

Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian stepped closer as their hands clenched tightly into fists. "You…"

Jin Zixuan, "What? Am I wrong? If she’s unhappy, then tell her to get rid of this engagement! I don’t care for your Shijie. If you care so much for her, why don't you ask her father for her hand! Doesn’t he treat you better than treating his own child or something?"

"JIN ZIXUAN!" screamed Yu Ziyuan, momentarily forgetting the pain from her broken arm. "I don't care if you dislike the engagement. How dare you disparage my daughter!"

Gasps filled the hall as a pale Jin Zixuan got to his feet and bowed to Jiang Yanli. "I'm so sorry! I was angry with being powerless in the situation and lashed out without thinking!"

Jiang Yanli turned her face away from Jin Zixuan to hide the tears in her eyes. "There is nothing to forgive. The engagement was forced upon you and you were not given a choice to accept or refuse."

Jin ZiXuan's heart dropped to his stomach as he straightened from his bow. Anxiety ripped through his body as his mind grappled for something… anything to make the situation better. "Please… Jiang-guniang. I-I let my fears cloud my judgement. My-my only examples of marriage were my parents and… I-I didn't want that. Our future selves seem to have realized something about each other. Please… give us a chance to find what they did."

Jiang Yanli sighed, "Jin-gongzi, our parents are our only examples of what marriage is like. I know the toll it takes on everyone when there is no mutual affection. I've always hoped for a love match and I am willing to wait for someone who will love me as much as I love them. If what my brothers have said is true, then I have hope that we can find that with each other."

The small smile on Jiang Yanli's face gave Jin ZIxuan hope that maybe he hasn't completely ruined things with her. Having returned to their seats, Wei Wuxian snickered as Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes.

At everyone's curious glances, Wei Wuxian laughed. "That's an improvement over his confession at Phoenix Mountain. I wonder if we're going to be seeing that. It was priceless! You should have seen his face!"

Jiang Wanyin moved to throw a punch but was pulled back by Wei Wuxian before he himself punched Jin Zixuan. Disciples rushed to pull the two apart before Nie Huaisang ran to grab a Senior disciple.

The scene shifts from the fight to the Yashi where Jiang Fengmian and Jin Guangshan sit before Lan-xiansheng in the Yashi. Seeming to make up his mind on something, Jiang Fengmian broached the topic regarding the engagement. "I was against this engagement in the first place but agreed as both our wives wanted it. But the situation as it is now, it looks like neither of the children are keen on it. It's best we don't force them." ***'Not unless we want their marriage to turn out like ours.'***

Shock crossed Jiang Yanli and Yu Ziyuan's face. They hadn't expected Jiang Fengmian to care about whether or not Jiang Yanli's marriage would be a happy one.

"What do the children know? Jiang-xiong, pay them no mind. They will do what we as the parents tell them to." Jin Guangshan pleaded before he brought the tea cup to his lips to hide his smirk.

Outwardly, he showed concern over dissolving the engagement. Inwardly, excitement coursed through Jin Guangshan as Jiang Fengmian spoke. He had been against this

engagement since his wife brought it up. There was no benefit to marriage. Yunmeng Jiang did not have enough wealth and they couldn't be cowed. The Jiang girl was no beauty and her cultivation was laughable at best. She would be an embarrassment as the future Jin-furen with only her name to benefit the sect.

"Embarrassment?!?!" Liu Rushi rounded on her husband. "You're the embarrassment here, you disgusting ingrate!"

Jiang Fengmian's eyes narrowed at his one time friend. "Seeing as you think so lowly of Yunmeng Jiang, we will rescind all alliances and trades with Lanling Jin if Jin Guangshan retains any kind of influence there."

Liu Rushi, " I assure you, Fengmian. He will be stripped of all power and influence when we return."

Seething with anger, Jin Guangshan's fingers flinched before he forced himself to remain silent and immobile. For his plan to work, they can't know he's no longer silenced or paralyzed. *'You're going to regret going up against me when that demon is under my control!'*

Meng Yao caught the movement as he was studying his father's reaction to these things being shown. He has already deduced that his silence through all this meant that he was restricted from talking somehow. His father had also been immobilized by the needles in his neck that seemed to have worn off if he could move his fingers. But why was he pretending he was still immobilized. What was he planning?

Jiang Fengmian sighs before setting his tea cup down, "Jin-xiong, we can set the engagement for them but we can't carry out the marriage in their place. They are the ones who will be spending the rest of their lives together." ***'Yanli deserves someone who loves her.'***

Once again, Jiang Yanli is pleasantly surprised. A smile graced her lips as she met his eyes and a smile forms on his in return. For the first time in a long while, she sees the love her father has for his children in his eyes.

Putting on an act of reluctance, Jin Guangshan agreed to dissolve the engagement. As Jiang Fengmian had been the one to bring up dissolving the engagement, he didn't have to worry about his wife's wrath. ***'Now I can secure a stronger alliance. Qin Cangye has a daughter… what's her name? Qin Su? She would be a good choice.'***

Yu Ziyuan and Liu Rushi's furious glares hone in on Jin Guangshan but before they could do anything, disgusted groans fell from the time travelers lips to the past cultivators' confusion.

Head Shaker addressed Jin Zixuan, "I would stay far away from that if I were you…far far away."

Hearing his daughter being insulted, Qin Cangye marched from his seat to stand before the Head Shaker, "And pray tell what's wrong with my daughter?"

Unfazed by the looming man, the Head Shaker simply fanned himself to the shock of Nie Mingjue and Nie Huaisang. "There are details that will come to light with this viewing and… well… you will soon understand. I would prepare myself for some unpleasant surprises."

Nie Huaisang leaned forward to whisper to Wei Ying and Jiang Cheng as their eyes tracked the Head Shaker. "Future me is amazing!" Wei Ying and Jiang Cheng nodded in agreement.

Qin Cangye, "You-"

Ling Wen interrupted, "Jin-gongzi, perhaps you and your mother should take a look at the scroll I handed you earlier. To avoid…distasteful surprises."

Now curious, Liu Rushi walked to her son's side as he unrolled the scroll. As they read what was written on the scroll, Liu Rushi's face became more and more red with anger while all color had drained from Jin Zixuan's.

Without warning, Liu Rushi launched herself at her husband. Her nails scratched his face as she slapped and punched him. "YOU VILE… DISGUSTING... MONSTER! I'LL HAVE YOU CASTRATED AND PUT DOWN LIKE THE RABID DOG THAT YOU ARE!"

Instinctively, Jin Guangshan grabbed her wrists to keep her from doing further damage. That broke Jin Zixuan out of his trance and he rushed to pull his mother out of his father's reach. Wen Qing immediately moved to once again paralyze Jin Guangshan to his dismay. *'Troublesome woman! I won't let this go so easily!'*

Jin Zixuan pulled his mother back to his seat as she continued to thrash and kick while screaming insults towards his father. His mind is still on the list of names on the scroll as his stomach turned at the thought of what his father had done.

"Madam Jin… please calm yourself. This is most unbecoming!" Qin Cangye tried to intervene and stood between Jin Guangshan and his wife.

"Calm myself?!?!??! CALM MYSELF?!?! You read this yourself and see if you can calm down." Lie Rushi continued to yell as she threw the scroll at Qin Cangye. Jiang Yanli pulled her to sit between herself and Jin Zixuan then grabbed her hand to draw soothing circles on the back of it.

Qin Cangye unrolled the scroll with furrowed eyebrows and began to read. Before long, shock and eventually anger overtook his features. Marching over to where Jin Guangshan sat, Qin Cangye grabbed him by the collar and yanked him out of his seat.

Punch after punch landed on Jin Guangshan's face, each more powerful than the last as anger continued to build inside Qin Cangye. Eventually several Sect Leaders were able to pull him off of Jin Guangshan. "My wife?!?!? You dared to lay your hands on my wife?!?!? My A-Su...oh my god..."

It took several more tries from the Sect Leaders to pull Qin Cangye back to calm down as he continued to launch himself at Jin Guangshan. "Laoling Qin will no longer have any ties to Lanling Jin. We will be seeking justice for the rape of my wife by Jin Guangshan." Qin

Cangye growled out as he finally allowed the stunned Sect Leaders to pull him back into a seat.

One thought was prominent in everyone's mind: If Jin Guangshan dared to rape his closest ally's wife… What female would be safe then?

Jiang Fengmian, "Jin-furen, Jin-gongzi. So long as this man is still alive, my daughter will never step foot into Lanling nor will she be left alone in the presence of any Jin."

Jin Zixuan closed his eyes in defeat before he nodded to acknowledge Jiang Fengmian's words. "I will personally assure that Jiang-guniang will always have a non-Jin chaperone when I visit Lotus Pier."

Jiang Fengmian nods in return. "You and your mother will always be welcomed in Lotus Pier."

Pei Ming stared at the lump of flesh that was Jin Guangshan with disgust. "Only weak men force themselves on women to feel superior. I am ashamed to know that you are amongst my followers."

Zewu-jun, "Perhaps now would be a good time to take a short break. I'm sure everyone is in need of refreshments."

"Gege, I will be right back. I forgot something back in the Ghost City." Hua Cheng stood to leave. "Why don't you catch up with A-Ying?"

Xie Lian, "Mn. Hurry back, San Lang."

Sharp eyes followed Hua Cheng as he walked to the door and pulled out his dice. *'If I can get those dice, perhaps there is a way for all of us to get out of here before anything more unsavory gets revealed.'*

As everyone broke into small chatter, Wei Ying excused himself from his friends and made his way over to Wei Wuxian with Lan Zhan at his side. Before losing his nerve, Wei Ying asked, "The lotus seeds… were they… were they the ones from the Burial Mounds?"

Wei Wuxian let out a sad sigh, "They were. Years after… my death, I returned to the Burial Mounds with Xie- I mean Baba and A-Die." He quickly amended after receiving glares from his parent. "There were several that survived all those years so we transplanted them to Puqi Shrine. They're a labor of love and a reminder of the family that I lost. We have a pond at the back of the Jingshi, perhaps I can plant these to carry on the memory."

Taking the seat that Jiang Wanyin had vacated during the break, Wei Ying sat beside Wei Wuxian and scratched the side of his nose nervously.

Lan Wangji radiated amusement as he watched Wei Ying build up the courage to ask his questions. Although it was Wei Ying's soul that he fell in love with, he couldn’t stop himself from taking in the face that he never thought he would ever be able to see again.

"So…" Wei Ying begins. "What happens now? Will everything we do after we get out change your timeline?"

Wei Wuxian takes a moment to consider the options. "Time is a series of overlapping ribbons of a sort. There will be moments that overlap between two timelines before they diverge and one changes direction. I believe this would be one of those moments. It shouldn't affect our timeline as much as it does yours since it will diverge and change directions from here."

Wei Ying, "But there's no definite way of knowing until we get out?"

"Right!" Wei Wuxian smiled before his eyes narrowed in suspicion as the Heavenly Officials exchanged subtle glances.

As if suddenly remembering something important, WeiYing jolted in his seat."Wait… how come the Gods can leave but we can't?"

Xie Lian, "Ah… that's because of the array. Those related to you and your timelines are brought here by the array. Any additional persons are able to be brought in but they won't be able to leave until the array has served its purpose. Since the Heavenly Officials and the Ghost Kings are related to A-Ying during his death and because we are no longer humans, we fall outside the limits of the array. We can come and go as we please."

"Where did you say you found the array again?" Wei Wuxian asked. Now curious to take a much closer look at the array.

Xie Lian, "We found it in Qishan. Actually, it was drawn on a pillar leading into what would have been an archery field."

Wei Ying, "That's where I saw the array in our timeline! Do you think someone in the past would have to draw and activate the array in both timelines?"

Lan Wangji, "Perhaps the array appeared in your time once the array in our timeline activated."

Lan Zhan, "Mn. Time travel has never been done before. That is more likely."

"Awww isn't Lan Zhan the smartest?" Sighed Wei Wuxian as he leaned into a smiling Lan Wangji's chest. Wei Ying and Lan Zhan exchanged shy smiles as Wei Ying blushed red again. "I'm never going to recover from this… my face is going to permanently stay red"

Lan Zhan, "Mn. Cute." Causing Wei Ying to blush even more red to Wei Wuxian's amusement.

"Oye! Lao He, move out of the way so others can eat too!" Shouted Shi Qingxuan before he shifted to his male form.

"There's plenty of room. It's not my fault they're scared to approach me." He Xuan shrugged between bites. The table continued to replenish food as it's eaten so he's made himself comfortable there.

Shi Qingxuan, "Everyone ignore the grumpy Calamity and come eat!"

Mu Qing and Feng Xin eyed the table with suspicion as food continued to appear as they were taken. Laughing at their distrust, Xie Lian reassured them. "This is food conjured from A-Ying's memories and are his favorites. Most of them are food that his Shijie cooked. A few seem to be what Lan Wangji has cooked for him though I would… steer clear of those. You know his love for spice."

At the mention of Wei Wuxian's love for spice, many began to sweat bullets. Mu Qing's tongue began to tingle and his taste buds shrink in fear. Feng Xin and Pei Xiu backed away slowly from the bright red dishes and automatically reached for something to drink as if to stave off the phantom burning in their mouths.

Hua Cheng returned as everyone had finished their meals and settled himself next to Xie Lian. At Xie Lian's questioning glance, he replied, "I had to pick up something that I forgot to bring along for A-Ying."

Clearing his throat, Lan-xiansheng inquired if everyone was ready to continue. With that, they all turned back to the cloth.

The image changes as Lan Wangji stops behind a column in front of the Ancestral Hall.

Lan Wangji's eyes widened with concern as his eyes landed on a kneeling Wei Wuxian, whose shoulders were shaking slightly. *'Wei Ying'*

"Not only was I punished for fighting but I also made Jiang-shushu have to come all the way here." Wei Wuxian cried as tears ran down his cheeks. Lan Wangji took a step towards Wei Wuxian with furrowed eyebrows, however stopped when Wei Wuxian slumped forward on both hands.

Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian watch the scene in confusion. *'What...?'*

"Peacock, how dare you use your spiritual power during the fight!" Wei Wuxian groaned out in pain as he clutched his chest.

"That… that didn't happen…" Wei Ying spoke. The others looked at Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian as they continued to watch with their eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

"Wei Ying!" Lan Wangji quickly moved to Wei Wuxian's side.

Wei Wuxian turned and curiously looked over his shoulder at Lan Wangji. No tears or injuries in sight. "Lan Zhan, what are you doing here? Were you punished, too?"

Wei Wuxian, "Oh!!"

Wei Ying breaks down laughing, "Oh!!!! Oh my god, Lan Zhan! Did you really think..."

The scene zooms over Wei Wuxian's shoulder as he turns back around and bends over an ant hill in the ground. "You know what? I found an ant hill. Let me teach you how to play with it."

Lan Wangji's face darkens and his eyebrows twitch as he watches Wei Wuxian continue.

The sight of Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan's red ears pushed their amusement over the edge and both Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying bent over laughing.

"First, put bait in it."

Twitch

"Then, get a twig."

Twitch

"Finally, stab the nest with the twig. Isn't this fun? Lan Zhan, give it a try!"

The entire hall has now erupted in uncontrollable laughter. Lan Qiren huffed in resigned defeat seeing how his punishment had no effect on the boy whatsoever. It was then that he noticed with surprise that Lan-xiansheng was also chuckling along with the rest.

Lan Wangji, "You were punished to kneel and reflect... but you play with ants?"

Giggling, Wei Wuxian holds up the twig with ants crawling all over it to his face, "But these ants are so cute! Are you sure you don't wanna stab it?"

Lan Jingyi laughed so hard he fell over on top of Lan Sizhui's lap, "Oh my god… I can't…"

Ouyang Zizhen and Jin Ling were leaning shoulder to shoulder clutching their sides, "Wei-qianbei! I knew you were my hero for a reason!"

Now angry, Lan Wangji flicks his sleeves and turns to leave. "So unteachable."

Catching Lan Wangji leaving out of the corner of his eyes, Wei Wuxian turns to question him with a pout. "Lan Zhan? Why are you leaving? Lan Zhan! What a shame... You haven't seen my masterpiece yet."

"I don't think he ever wants to see you again." Jiang Wanyin approached with a sneer on his face as he watched Lan Wangji stalk off. "Look at how well-behaved you are, finally kneeling properly."

Lan Wangji watched the scene as he felt his heart drop. *'Was this why Wei Ying believed I hated him? Because everyone told him I did?'*

'This punishment is nothing compared to those at home' **Wei Wuxian laughed as he boasted, "Of course! I kneel all the time. But Jin Zixuan is a spoiled peacock so he's definitely never been punished to kneel before. If I don't make him feel the pain of kneeling to the point that he cries for his parents, my last name isn't Wei."**

Wei Wuxian's thoughts sobered many from their amusement. If what they've already witnessed earlier was a regular occurrence at home, then of course kneeling is nothing

compared to it. Yu Ziyuan can feel the angry glares directed towards her and forces herself to ignore it. The Heavenly Officials watched on curiously as they noticed the hateful glares sent Yu Ziyuan's way. Something happened before they arrived it seems.

“Aren't you ashamed of what you’re saying?” Jiang Wanyin quietly said, “Father rushed here for you.”

Jiang Cheng looked down at his hands. *'Please don’t let them show my thoughts…'*

Sombering from Jiang Wangyin’s words, Wei WuXian began looking around, “Shijie didn’t come, did she?”

Jiang Wanyin, “Why would she come? To see how you lost face for her? If she did come, wouldn’t she already have come to your side and brought you medicine?”

Yu Ziyuan couldn't hold back the snort that escaped her lips and mumbled. "Like she's some servant…"

Once again sighing, Wei Wuxian looked down to the ground with a frown, “… It’d be nice if Shijie came.”

Rolling his eyes, Jiang Wanyin smacked Wei Wuxian’s arm. “If you didn’t push me back, I would have balanced out the other side of Jin ZiXuan’s face.”

Once again putting on a smiling face, Wei Wuxian smirked, “Nah. He looks uglier right now, with an asymmetrical face. I heard that he values his face a lot. He’s probably horrified with how he looks right now. Hahahaha…”

Jin Zixuan can feel phantom pains on his face where Wei Wuxian had punched him. Without using spiritual energy, he was pretty strong.

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes while Wei WuXian wiped away a tear from laughing so hard, “I should have let you hit him. Then maybe Jiang-shushu wouldn’t have to come. But I had no choice!”

"You're right. He wouldn't have come. He only ever drops everything for the likes of you!" Yu Ziyuan bit out. Her anger barely restrained due to her pain. Why wasn't her golden core healing her arm?

Jiang Fengmian, "San Niang! Enough!"

Jiang Wanyin shrugged. Even though Wei Wuxian’s words were casual, it was unfortunately true. His father never rushed to another sect for something related to him, whether it was big or small.

Jiang Fengmian was taken back by Jiang Cheng’s thoughts. That's not true. Jiang Cheng had never given him a reason to have to drop everything and rush to his side. The boy may cause trouble with Wei Wuxian but never anything as serious as the trouble Wei Wuxian causes. Does that make it seem like he wouldn’t do the same for his kids?

As if he knew Jiang Wanyin's thoughts were starting to spiral, Wei Wuxian threw an arm around his shoulders. "Go on. You don't need to stay with me. If Lan Wangji comes back again, you'll get in trouble. If you have time, go sneak a look at Jin Zixuan and describe how idiotic he looks kneeling down to me later!"

A short while later, Wei Wuxian turned around as the sound of pebbles crunching beneath boots drew closer to him and smiled.

"A-Xian. Come on, let's go home."

Hua Cheng, "What is the punishment for fighting in the Cloud Recesses?"

Lan Xichen, "Depending on the severity and the cause, it ranges from copying of rules, strikes from the discipline rulers, or expulsion."

Hua Cheng, "So they were both expelled?"

Lan Qiren coughed to clear his throat, "Jin-gongzi was punished with kneeling and copying the rules."

Hua Cheng's narrowed at Lan Qiren, "But A-Ying was expelled. Because of his past transgressions or because you believed he was the cause of the fight?"

Lan Qiren, "Wei Wuxian was the aggressor. It took several senior disciples to pull them apart."

Mu Qing, "So you assumed A-Ying was the instigator and expelled him without question. Well now we know he wasn't."

Xie Lian, "And if it was Jiang Wanyin who had been in the fight instead of A-Ying?"

Lan Qiren, swallowed before answering, "He would have been given the same punishment as Jin-gongzi. The Sect Leaders would have been notified but their presence would not be required."

Feng Xin rolled his eyes, "Should have let Jiang Wanyin punch him, A-Ying. He'd only get a slap on the wrist like the other sect heir over there. What's a little embarrassment if he's defending his sister?"

"I think Gusu Lan needs to review their ancestors' teachings before they stray much further." Baoshan Sanren intoned, displeasure clear in her words.

Night has fallen on the Cloud Recesses as crickets chirped in the night. White boots stopped in front of a small ant hill and a stick was gently stabbed into it. A mass of ants crawled out and began to make its way towards the bait that was already placed on the ground before it.

Wei Ying perked up at the scene. "You went back to see it!"

Lan Zhan, "Mn."

Lan Wangji dropped the stick in his hand when he stepped back as the image zoomed out and more of the ground could be seen. As the ants found the baits, images started to take shape.

A wolf with his face turned towards the second image.

(Lang) (Wang)

A chicken.

(JI)

"You cheeky boy!" Lan Wangji ground out between his clenched teeth and turned to leave.

Once again, Nie Mingjue's laughter was the loudest in the hall. "That's it! I'm adopting you as an honorary member of Qinghe Nie, Wei Wuxian. I'm not taking no for an answer!"

"Good riddance!" muttered Yu Ziyuan under her breath. The rest of the Jiangs frowned at the announcement. Yet another person is claiming the rights to take Wei Wuxian away from Yunmeng Jiang. They can't let that happen.

House of Cards

Chapter Summary

The Lotus known as Jiang Yanli.

Ghost Child WWX caused mayhem so adult WWX is banned from the fun stuff.

The Head Shaker: I'm a Sect Leader, Bish.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Head Shaker shared a look with Jiang Wanyin, Lan Wangji, and Zewu-jun. Nie Mingjue's easy acceptance of Wei Wuxian, even with the knowledge that he became a demonic cultivator in that future, answered several of their "what if" questions.

What if they had shown that they'd be willing to at least listen to the reasons for Wei Wuxian's actions? They would then have at least a fraction of the knowledge they had today. So many innocent lives would have been spared.

What if they had shown him that he wasn't as alone as he was made to feel? Things wouldn't have ended in so much tragedy. The brotherly bond between Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian wouldn't still be as fragile as it is today.

What if they had insisted on seeing things for themselves instead of just taking the Jins' words at face value? Then the labor camps would have been uncovered sooner and the guilty parties would have been punished instead of civilians being tortured and slaughtered.

What if they hadn't taken Jin Guangyao's pretty words as truth and allowed it to rile them up?

What if they had paid more attention to why Wei Wuxian, someone who was so proud and confident in his sword skills that he came off as arrogant, would suddenly no longer carry his sword?

What if they questioned why Wei Wuxian would suddenly throw his life away to protect any Wens when he had slaughtered so many during the war?

What if… Wei Wuxian never came to Lotus Pier?

Being here in this place and being shown all of their missteps and mistakes… it pulls up painful memories and digs up traitorous feelings. Not just for them… but for Wei Wuxian as well. For the one soul that the cultivation world had, and still is, wronged in so many ways.

Wei Wuxian maintains that he was no saint nor was he completely innocent in his actions. His morality during the Sunshot Campaign was still an uncomfortable debate for many. The rules during wartime and the rules during peacetime were vastly different.

One can hold on to their morality, humanity, and righteousness during peaceful times. But in wartime… one cannot be in a war and still hold on to their morality. Their righteousness. Their humanity may be barely hanging on by a thread but morality? Righteousness? When you must choose between your death or your enemies'... those ideals take on new meanings. No one can survive the horrors of war and come out the same. No one.

Sunlight glistened across the water filled with both white and pink lotus blooms as a boat tread its surface. A black robed hand dips into the water on the side of the boat. The image moves upwards to show Wei Wuxian staring melancholically out over the water.

Jiang Fengmian turns a worried glance to his ward from where he stood at the bow of the boat. Wei Wuxian had been quiet since they left the Cloud Recesses. It wasn't like him to be so quiet and still.

Those who knew Wei Wuxian… knew this look well.

The Heavenly Officials and Ghost Kings knew. They'd often catch A-Ying staring off at a point beyond where only he could see and lose himself in his memories when it returned with the last few fragments of his soul.

Gusu Lan knew. Those were the days where Wei Wuxian would be more subdued. The Cloud Recesses would be more silent. Even the birds couldn't find a reason to sing. On those days, the notes of Clarity played in turn on different instruments would float through the air until sunset. Each Junior and Senior disciple is determined to master the song. Because their Wei-qianbei was worth it.

Yunmeng Jiang knew. The private pavillion that once belonged to Yu-furen became off-limits to all but family. Meals were delivered by the elderly cook who was away attending her daughter's first birth when Lotus Pier fell. Although subdued on those days, disciples trained harder and longer. They won't allow anyone to think that Yunmeng Jiang was too weak to defend Wei-qianbei again.

From their seats, the past cultivators observed the sudden shift in the hall. The worried glances thrown towards Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying by the future cultivators spoke volumes. Unease settles deep in their bones as they realize things will only get worse from here.

The sounds of the market floats to them and pulls Jiang Fengmian's attention away. *'Home,'* he thought with a smile.

The beautiful scene of Lotus Pier slowly comes into view as the docks take shape and the many vendors begin to sprout in the horizon. A figure in purple robes stood waiting on the docks.

Appreciative chatter fills the hall as Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian soak up the view of their childhood memories as tears form.

Ah, Lotus Pier as it's meant to be before it all went wrong. This was the Lotus Pier of their childhood. Even though Jiang Wanyin had rebuilt it to look almost exactly alike, it was never the same Lotus Pier again. Scorched earth and blood stained slabs of rock serve as reminders of the tragedies and violence they'd witnessed.

Jin Ling watched the changes in scenery with wide awed eyes. This was the Lotus Pier his mother grew up in. The wooden planks that once held her footprints. The street vendors who greeted her with affection and respect.

Wen Qionglin lowered his head. The last time he saw this Lotus Pier it was in flames. Its occupants piled high without care or respect. Its owners' blood seeped into the ground before he and his men collected their bodies for burial. This was a Lotus Pier that still haunts him.

The viewers watch as, right before their eyes, Wei Wuxian's melancholy is forcefully pushed aside and a bright smile is pasted on his face the moment he recognizes the figure.

"Oh A-Xian…" Jiang Yanli cried out with tears in her eyes. She knew Wei Ying put up a front with everyone but she never knew just how much of his pain he was hiding from her.

Xie Lian once again fists his hand to keep calm. The Jiangs have single-handedly destroyed A-Ying's sense of self worth. It becomes more and more apparent with each scene they watch. As if feeling his agitation, Hua Cheng wrapped an arm around his shoulder and pulled him close. Although his face was calm, Xie Lian could feel Hua Cheng's anger rolling off him in waves.

On the dock, vendors continue on with their day. The melon vendor notices the purple robed figure and calls out. "Jiang-guniang, you're here early! Did you want to try some fresh melons?"

Turning towards the vendor, Jiang Yanli gave him a large smile. "Thank you but that's alright!"

'Beautiful.' Sighed Jin Zixuan. Ouyang Zizhen swore there were hearts in his eyes but Jin Ling cringed at the mere thought of his parents ever acting like his Da-jiu and Hanguang-jun.

Many of the cultivators have never met Jiang Yanli in person until this moment. All that they knew of her were from rumors and hearsay. That she was no beauty. Rather plain if rumors were to be believed. But in reality, she shone bright around her loved ones. That made her beautiful. Though she seemed weak, her true strength showed in the way she carried herself. In the way that she was able to diffuse many tense moments with mere words. No, Jiang Yanli was not weak.

"SHIJIE!!!"

Surprise showed on Jiang Yanli's face as she watched Wei Wuxian jump up and down in the boat. "A-Xian?"

"Shijie! I'm back!" Wei Wuxian shouted as he jumped from the boat when it was still a ways away on to the docks.

Concern clouded Jiang Yanli's face at once, "Watch out, be careful!"

"Shijie! I missed you so much!" Wei Wuxian pouted childishly as he ran up to Jiang Yanli.

Jin Ling, "What are you? Five?"

Wei Wuxian stuck his tongue out at his nephew, not even bothering to respond with words.

"How old are you to be missing your Shijie after only a few months away?" jokingly chidded Jiang Yanli.

"Xianxian is three!" Wei Wuxian flashed a bright smile while holding up three fingers.

The boys fell over laughing as the female cultivators "awww'd" at the joke.

Lan Jingyi, "Jin Ling! You gave him too much credit. He's three!"

Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying pouted to Lan Zhan and Lan Wangji, "Lan Zhan!!!! They're making fun of us!"

Lan Wangji swept Wei Wuxian's fringe from his eyes before addressing the boys. "Do not pick on A-Ying."

"Mn, He is only three." added Lan Zhan. More laughter filled the hall at Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying's outraged gasps.

Chuckling at the long running joke, Jiang Yanli smoothed back a stray hair on his head. "I thought you'd be gone for one whole year? Why are you back so soon?"

Wei Wuxian sheepishly scratched his neck. "I... it's because I missed you too much and wanted to come home!"

Jiang Fengmian smiled fondly at their interaction as he alighted from the boat. He caught the tail end of their conversation and internally cringed as Wei Wuxian requested his lotus soup to be "so spicy it makes you cry".

"A-Die" Jiang Yanli greeted her father as he approached.

Giving her a smile in response, Jiang Fengmian inquired, "Where is your A-Niang?"

"At... the drill ground."

Involuntary shudders ran through the Jiang and Wei boys. Noticing their reactions, the cultivators quickly became curious as to how Yunmeng Jiang trained their disciples. They're a sect known for their freedom and unrestricted style of fighting. Though they have always been a lively and carefree group at Discussion Conferences, their rankings in competitions remain a testament to their name and proof of why they remain one of the Great Sects.

A sea of purple comes into view as rows upon rows of Yunmeng Jiang disciples line up. Each figure stood in a horse stance with heavy weights in each hand held straight to their sides.

"Hold it!" A commanding voice cuts through the field.

"Yes... Furen."

"If you don't have the strength to do something as simple as this, how will you fight spirits and monsters? Do you want to run headfirst to your death? Hold it for two more hours!"

"TWO HOURS?!?!"

"H-How long were… were they holding that position before then?" Yao-zongzhu stammered out.

"They were at the three hour mark." Yu Ziyuan replied with a scoff. This was just light training for them.

Nie Huaisang paled at her words. "Jiang-xiong… maybe I shouldn't come to study at Lotus Pier."

"That's fine. Wei Wuxian can train you at the Unclean Realm." Nie Mingjue smirked at his brother as he paled even more.

A scowling Yu Ziyuan comes into view, perched on a chair on the dais overlooking the drill ground. Her thumb absentmindedly twirling a purple ring decorated in lightning bolts.

"You should be focusing on improving your skills instead of fooling around and taking after that good-for-nothing Wei Wuxian!"

Behind Yu Ziyuan stood her two maids, Yinzhu and Jinzhu. Both maids sported identical scowls as their master.

"We sent him to Gusu to learn and he still managed to cause trouble and cause Yunmeng Jiang to lose face. Are you still going to follow his lead?"

The atmosphere in the hall suddenly dropped several degrees as frowns made its way onto the Immortal Beings' faces. The cultivators sat uneasy in their seats at the sudden shift.

Hoping to cut off her mother's tirade, Jiang Yanli hurried to greet her mother. "A-Niang."

"Yanli." Yu Ziyuan's eyes softened at the sight of her daughter before narrowing again at the sight of Wei Wuxian mid bow behind her husband and daughter. "Yu Furen."

"San Niang, haste makes waste. The level of cultivation these children can reach is their own destiny. If you push them too hard, it may be detrimental."

Nods and murmurs of agreements followed Jiang Fengmian's words. A cultivator's skill is directly related to their own abilities.

"While it is beneficial to push their limits, too much and too fast will cause irreparable injury or worse, qi deviation." warned Lan Qiren.

Rage built in her chest at his words. "Always defending them, that's why they won't achieve anything! Especially Wei Wuxian! He picks fights with others and you clean up his mess. Such impudence!"

Wei Wuxian flinched and looked to the ground at the mention of his name. He and Jiang Yanli mentally prepared themselves for the age-old fights.

Mu Qing, "I don't know about you… but I'm getting awfully tired of hearing A-Ying's name pulled into every argument."

Pei Xiu, "How old was A-Ying when they brought him to Lotus Pier?"

Ling Wen, "He was nine. He's 15 here."

Feng Xin, "We're already tired of their arguments and we've only been here for a few hours. A-Ying's been enduring this for at least six years. Ling Wen, help him ascend already!"

Shi Qingxuan, "He can be the new Wind Master!"

"NO!!!"

Jolted from their seats at the Heavenly Officials and Ghost Kings' shouts, the cultivators turned confused eyes towards them.

"Did you forget the last time you let A-Ying hold your fan after I fixed it… again? Five towns were under water. Five!!!" He Xuan asked.

Feng Xin, "30 of my temples are still being rebuilt from that spectacle! No, thank you."

Mu Qing huffed, "I'm still pulling arrows out of the training fields and the Martial Gods' palaces near it."

Hua Cheng, "Nope. I'm still rounding up dispersed ghosts from my dungeons. A-Ying is not allowed anywhere near the Wind Master's Fan. Ever."

Mu Qing, "No Meteor Hammer."

Ling Wen, "No Wuse Bi."

Xie Lian, "I've already hidden the Yu Pipa."

The list grew as the Heavenly Officials and Ghost Kings continued on.

Pei Ming, "No bricks."

Wait...Bricks????

Wei Wuxian nervously chuckled and rubbed the back of his neck at the shocked gapes he received. "In my defense… I was a 10 year old ghost boy."

Lan Sizhui chuckled, "It's a good thing that Hanguang-jun built your workshop in the back hills then."

"Thankfully the Cloud Recesses is still standing in one piece." Lan-xiansheng sighed to the amusement of the Lans.

Wen Qing, "Looks like we'll have to Wei Wuxian-proof everything from now on."

"San Niang!"

"What? Am I wrong? He's always messing around and now he has disgraced us in Gusu! He knows that Yanli and Zixuan are engaged but he still fought with Zixuan!"

Eyes turned to Jin Zixuan, making him blush. "Sorry..."

Quick to intervene, Jiang Yanli pulled her mother's attention to her. "A-Niang, don't be angry. They said Jiang Cheng is doing well in Gusu. Even Lan-xiansheng praised him."

"That boy… At least he didn't let us down. Jinzhu, Yinzhu, let's go." Yu Ziyuan's features softened at the mention of her son before turning to leave the drill ground.

"Shijie to the rescue!" cheered Wei Ying as Jiang Yanli giggled into her sleeve.

Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Cheng watched the cloth in awe. *'Was… was that… a compliment? From A-Niang?'*

It was obvious that Yu Ziyuan loved her children. Her demeanor changes when she focuses solely on them. It softens her a little. It's the beauty of a mother's love.

The Jiang disciples maintained their bows until Yu Ziyuan was no longer in sight. They eye Wei Wuxian and Jiang Fengmian as if gauging whether it was ok to approach or not.

Chuckling in amusement at his disciples' antics, Jiang Fengmian cleared his throat. "Your shidis haven't seen you for a while. Go and greet them."

Not needing further encouragement, the disciples' faces brightened before Wei Wuxian tackled the first disciples in his way with glee. "Did you miss me?"

Nie Mingjue smiled at the joy on Wei Wuxian's face. "It's very obvious that he loves them."

"DA-SHIXIONG!"

The drill ground shook as ecstatic disciples pounced and piled on Wei Wuxian. Play fighting soon ensued as Wei Wuxian "fought" the younger disciples.

Lan Xichen chuckled, "And they love him just as much."

Lan Sizhui sighed happily, "He loves their company. This is how he is around all the disciples. His 'Ducklings' as he likes to call us."

"Did they also punish you like this in Cloud Recesses?"

Wei Wuxian, "No, even worse! They made me copy books!"

That earned a couple chuckles and coos. Some agreed, they'd rather endure physical punishment than have to sit and copy text.

"Did you meet Lan Wangji?"

"Is he really as good as they say?"

Wei Wuxian, "He's as good as they say, if not better! We are neck to neck in skill! It's amazing!"

"They say he can freeze people if they get too close. Is that true?"

Chuckling at the disciples' question, Wei Wuxian ruffled one of the junior disciples' hair. "He's just a man, not some monster!"

Lan Zhan's ears turned red as happiness spread through his chest. *'Wei Ying.'*

"Do they really have 3,000 house rules?"

Wei Wuxian, "It's true! They even cut them on a huge rock in seal script! It was hard to read so I didn't bother."

The barrage of questions continued as they exited the drill ground to prepare for dinner.

Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying watched on with heavy hearts. The image of their shidis' bodies piled on top of each other overlaps with their smiling faces in their minds.

Jiang Cheng felt a twinge of jealousy in his chest. Though they all train and spend time together, the shidis weren't as close to him as they were to Wei Wuxian. His temperament isn't the only thing to blame. His insecurities played a part as well.

The position of Head Disciple is normally taken up by the heir. But in Yunmeng Jiang, one's skills are the deciding factors, not one's right to inherit. Hence, Wei Wuxian was Head Disciple. He was just better. In skills. In learning. In making friends. In embodying the sect moto.

Hours later as the sun slowly set over the calm waters of the Lotus Pier, the figure of Jiang Fengmian approached the pavilion where Yu Ziyuan sat. "San Niang."

"It's late, what are you doing here?" Yu Ziyuan asked without looking towards Jiang Fengmian.

Jiang Fengmian let out a sigh. Looks like there are really no private moments in this viewing. Though it was no secret that their marriage is rock, for others to witness and possibly judge their actions… it felt jarring.

Jiang Fengmian stopped before the table. "I went to your room looking for you but Jinzhu said I'd find you here."

Yu Ziyuan continued to look out into the water as she sipped from her tea cup. "What did you need?"

Though the surrounding was peaceful, there was still a palpable tension.

Jiang Fengmian slid a jewelry box on the table towards Yu Ziyuan. Barely glancing at the box, Yu Ziyuan smirked condescendingly over the rim of her tea cup.. "You know I don't care for jewelry."

With a sigh. Jiang Fengmian opened the box to reveal a beautiful dark green jade hair pin before taking a seat. "This hairpin is of good quality and quite beautiful so I bought it for you."

Liu Rushi could smack her friend then and there. Here was Yu Ziyuan's husband, the man she adamantly claims holds no affection for her, buying her a beautiful hair pin. He knew it suited her so he bought it. But here she was… rejecting such a gesture like it was dirt under her fingers without even taking a glance at it.

Several silent moments passed before Jiang Fengmian let out a breath and spoke. "San Niang, Jin-zongzhu and I discussed Yanli and Jin Zixuan's engagement while we were in Gusu."

"That was no discussion. It was manipulation on Jin Guangshan's part to throw all the blame on you." Yu Ziyuan ground out as she angrily glared at the heap of golden robes on the ground.

It looks like no one's going to help the man up from the ground. Good.

Side glancing at Jiang Fengmian, Yu Ziyuan interrupted, "Rushi and I arranged their marriage since they were little. Is there a problem?"

Anticipating an argument, Jiang Fengmian took a breath and pressed on. "Jin-zongzhu and I have decided to call off the engagement."

Finally giving Jiang Fengmian her full attention, Yu Ziyuan rounded on her husband. "WHAT!?!? Why would you do that?"

Jiang Fengmian, "All this time, seeing Yanli, I thought the two loved each other. But it seems I was wrong. We shouldn't force them."

"Yanli and Zixuan have met several times throughout the years. It's obvious she likes him. Did Zixuan say something rude? He's too young to understand things now. Zixuan will realize what a good girl Yanli is after he gets to know her. His mother and I are good friends and our families have always been allies from the beginning. Their marriage with cement our alliance with Lanling Jin." Yu Ziyuan spoke as she turned her attention back to the water.

It was no secret that Meishan Yu and Ya'an Liu were fearsome allies. While Meishan Yu boasted first class spiritual weapons, Ya'an boasted the best teas and medicinal herbs all around. Due to their sect's unwavering alliance, Yu Ziyuan and Liu Rushi grew up together and eventually became sworn sisters.

An alliance with one meant an alliance with both sects. What Jin Guangshan failed to remember was, an alliance with Yunmeng Jiang came with Meishan Yu in tow. In snubbing Yunmeng Jiang, an alliance with Meishan Yu is now off the table. Their first class spiritual weapons are no longer made available to Lanling Jin.

Jiang Fengmian, "Marriage means spending their lives together. If they don't love each other but they're forced to be together just for their families' interests-"

Yu Ziyuan again cuts him off. "Just like us, right?"

Once again exhausted with having the same arguments, Jiang Fengmian attempted to de-escalate the situation. "San Niang, you know that's not what I meant."

"Wei Ying, that ungrateful brat! Always causing trouble wherever he goes!" Yu Ziyuan shouted.

"What?" several confused voices asked.

Nie Mingjue also voiced his confusion, "What exactly does Wei Wuxian have to do with why those two shouldn't be forced to get married?"

Lan Xichen, "I don't quite understand either…"

"Again… you are blaming him for everything." Jiang Fengmian shook his head.

Slamming her teacup on the table, Yu Ziyuan stood from her seat. "Shouldn't I blame him?!? None of this would have happened if he hadn't fought with Zixuan! You've favored him since the day you brought him here! If it was Jiang Cheng who had been in the fight, would you have rushed to Gusu? No you wouldn't!"

The Head Shaker, "Why are you constantly comparing those two when you can't make your point? What does Jiang-zongzhu's supposed favoring of Ying-ge have anything to do with whether or not he would rush to The Cloud Recesses if it was Cheng-ge who got into a fight? Lan-xiansheng *demanded* their presence post haste so they both came. If Lan-xiansheng had only *suggested* he come, I highly doubt he would even make the trip. It wasn't about who was in the fight but how his presence was requested."

Unable to stand the man's disrespect, Yu Ziyuan stood to her feet. "What we discuss is between my husband and I. How dare you address me in that manner. I will not have a *child* speak to me in that tone."

The Head Shaker, "You seem to forget that this *child* you're speaking down to is the Sect Leader of Qinghe Nie. I have tried to be respectful as you are my sworn brother, Cheng-ge's mother. However, your mistreatment of Ying-ge, my eldest sworn brother, now nullifies any societal obligations I have towards you. Get over yourself."

Seeing Nie Mingjue's thunderous glare directed at her, Yu Ziyuan realized her mouth had landed her into trouble once again. Scoffing to hide her discomfort, Yu Ziyuan sat back down beside Jiang Fengmian.

"We're sworn brothers!?!?!" asked Nie Huaisang, Jiang Cheng, and Wei Ying in unison.

"After a few ups and downs, yes. Now you just drive Shufu crazy with your monthly… ah… get togethers in Caiyi. Emperor's Smiles in tow, of course." Zewu-jun chuckled along with their older counterparts at their shock.

Jiang Fengmian, "San Niang!"

Yu Ziyuan scoffed at Jiang Fengmian as she turned to leave, "This time he got between Yanli and Zixuan. Who knows what troubles he will cause next time? But that's alright, isn't it? You'll be there to clean up after him!" An ugly sneer appeared on her face before she began to walk away.

Displeased, Baoshan Sanren eyed Yu Ziyuan. "So you are placing blame on the boy because you couldn't stand losing an argument. Just like how you place the blame on him for every wrong you perceived."

"It wouldn't matter what kind of trouble comes along, it would still be Wei Wuxian's fault in her eyes." Observed Wen Qing. Wen Ning nodded in agreement at her side. Knowing what they knew of Wen Rouhan and his sons, they would exploit that for their own purposes.

Across the pavilion, Wei Wuxian stood hidden behind a pillar. Heart heavy and head bowed as he watched the two Yunmeng leader's interaction. *'Good job Wei Wuxian. You caused another fight.'*

"It would have still happened eventually." Jiang Wanyin explained. "Jin Zixuan's behavior and attitude towards A-Jie became worse during the war. He and Wei Wuxian would have come to blows one way or another. If anything, I would have joined him if I weren't the Sect Leader."

Jiang Wanyin looked Jin Zixuan in the eyes for several moments, "You were an ass. You humiliated A-Jie and made her cry. Wei Wuxian knocked some much needed sense into you a few more times before A-Jie forgave you."

"And I'll do it again, even knowing you two will end up together. Make Shijie cry and I'll rearrange your ugly face." Wei Ying threatened.

Jin Zixuan held up both hands in surrender as he nodded in agreement. "I swear I'll do whatever it takes to make her happy!" earning him scoff from the brothers.

Turning on his heel, Wei Wuxian made his way back to his room. Passing a courtyard along the way, he notices Jiang Yanli quietly contemplating at the stone table. *'Shijie…'*

His right foot was halfway down one step before he stopped and pulled it back. His heart tugged painfully knowing he was the cause for her broken engagement. *'I don't deserve to appear before Shijie…'*

This displeased Jiang Yanli. Her brothers should always feel it's his right to appear before her.

Before he could turn around and leave, Jiang Yanli called out to him. "A-Xian, is that you?"

Having been caught, Wei Wuxian made his way towards Jiang Yanli with his head bowed. "Shijie. I'm sorry... I-"

"Silly…" Jiang Yanli stopped his words. "It isn't your fault."

Wei Wuxian still didn't raise his head. "... I made you sad."

"A-Xian, sit down first." Jiang Yanli pat the seat next to her telling Wei Wuxian to sit down.

Once Wei Wuxian was seated, Jiang Yanli began to pour tea for him and herself. They took a moment to savor the tea before she spoke again. "Ever since I can remember, A-Niang has told me Jin Zixuan would be my future husband. Though I've only met him a few times, a man full of charisma like him is hard not to like. Recently, I've been really thinking about things between us. I realized... I didn't love him as much as I had thought. I mean, I could see myself spending my life with him. But if we don't love each other…"

Her words pierced Jin Zixuan's heart. He caused her to feel this way.

"Shijie…" Wei Wuxian still did not lift his head to look at Jiang Yanli.

Jiang Yanli, "He must have said something unpleasant about me, right?"

Wei Wuxian turned his face away from Jiang Yanli as he pouted, "He didn't. I just... don't like him so I punched him...that's all."

Signing outwardly, Jiang Yanli patted Wei Wuxian's head. "A-Xian. We grew up together, I know you too well. You can't fool me. You never hit people just because you don't like them. Although Jin Zixuan is great, I'm willing to wait for a man who truly loves me so I can spend my life with him."

Ouyang Zizhen whispered, "Yao-zongzhu and my father would have been beaten to a pulp 100 times over already if Wei-qianbei goes around beating people he doesn't like."

Lan Jingyi rolled his eyes, "They would have been if Wei-qianbei was in the hall that day they questioned if Hanguang-jun should be allowed to be Chief Cultivator if he's willing to let Wei-qianbei 'corrupt' the juniors."

Jin Ling faced his father, "Even when he hates you, he doesn't disparage you when you deserve it. He'll protect A-Niang from your disdain but he'll also allow her to make her own choices regarding her happiness. That's how he shows his love."

Lan Sizhui, "Mn. He'll shield and protect you but he won't suffocate you with it."

"Like a big angry umbrella!" shouted Ouyang Zizhen. When he got no reply, he looked to find his friends looking at him like he's grown an extra head. "You know… he shields and protects you but doesn't suffocate like what an umbrella is for when it rains. And he gets angry when people hurt you… so big angry… umbrella?"

Lan Jingyi, "Why are we friends with him again?" Gaining shrugs from Jin Ling and Lan Sizhui.

Ouyang Zizhen pouts, "GUYS!!!!"

"Shijie… Jin Zixuan will never be good enough for you. He's spoiled and so vain. You deserve someone much better than him!" Wei Wuxian adamantly declared.

'Shijie will find a man that loves her as much as she loves him and then A-Cheng and I will give her the grandest wedding that puts those Jins to shame! Teach them to look down on Yunmeng Jiang!"

'This truly feels like an invasion of privacy. I'm afraid this wasn't what we intended when Shufu and I created the array.' Zewu-jun let out a sigh.

"You and Shufu created the array, Xichen-ge?" Asked an incredulous Wei Wuxian. Zewu-jun looked up to find shocked eyes directed at him.

"Oh… did I say that out loud?"

Chapter End Notes

Wuse Bi : Five-Colors Brush. When used, anything drawn by this brush will materialize or come to life.

Yu Pipa: The Eastern King's jade pipa capable of controlling the weather and elements, can also induce drowsiness.

Ya'an: Ya'an is an actual prefecture-level city in the western part of Sichuan Province where Meishan is located. As Madam Jin and Madam Yu are said to grow up together because their families were close, this city is the closest to Meishan.

Not a chapter update! - Small Sneak Peak

Leaving the sneak peak for the *drama*.

Thanks for sticking it out with me! ^_^

Unedited Sneak Peak:

Jiang Wanyin hastily untied his top from around his waist and pulled it on while the disciples scrambled to grab their tops. Yu Ziyuan's ire suddenly turned to Wei Wuxian.

"Wei Ying! Do you want to die!?"

Wei Wuxian flinched, "I'm sorry, Madam Yu! I didn't know Shijie would come looking for us! I'll go get changed right now!"

Yu Ziyuan became even angrier, "You dare run? Come back right now and kneel!"

Purple lightning slashed across the screen.

A painful scream ripped through the hall as all the viewer's horrified eyes focused on Yu Ziyuan's trembling form on the ground before them. Purple lightning streaks begin to appear on Yu Ziyuan's back. Before anyone could react, their attention is pulled back to the cloth by a muted grunt.

Wei Wuxian stumbled but caught himself as streaks of purple lightning branched out from a large slash running diagonally on his back.

Beans Are Evil... Bad Bad Beans.

Chapter Summary

Zewu-jun spilled the beans so now it's clean up time.

Su She's not having a good day.

Mama Cangse's way ahead of you, A-Ying.

Chapter Notes

Next chapter SHOULD be up tomorrow =)

There's a Supernatural reference in there because I thought it was hilarious. Can you find it? =D

“Xichen-ge?”

“A-Xian.” Lan-xiansheng breathed out a sigh before continuing. “Although it has been several decades since these events took place, Xichen and I… We still have our regrets. I know you have forgiven us because it is in your nature to forgive. But we could not forgive ourselves. My inaction and narrow mindedness indirectly contributed to your death and Wangji's scars.”

“Shufu-” Wei Wuxian began but was cut off.

“No one has lost more than you, A-Xian." Zewu-jun looked at his brother-in-law sadly. "No one has given more of themselves nor sacrificed more. All you received in return was scorn, disdain, and injustice. Yet, you still forgave and saved us after you returned."

The Jiangs' attention was diverted to Jiang Wanyin as they tried to make out what he was mumbling under his breath, "...stupid idiot...sacrifices...stupid plans...no sense...self preservation...always injured...break his damn legs."

Lan-xiansheng, "You took the young disciples under your wing and protected them although their sects called for your death time and time again. Even when the Jin's treachery was exposed and your innocence proven, the older generations still did not change their ways. The attempt on Wangji and A-Xian’s lives by the remnants of Jin Guangyao's followers and the Moling Su Sect showed us that things needed to change."

Suddenly Meng Yao and Su She found themselves the focus of the time travelers' hateful glares.

'The way they're glaring at me. Is that me? Jin… Guangyao? Instead of Zi *yao… to keep me out of the line of succession. I got Father's acceptance like I promised A-Niang. But judging by their words and glares, I must have done something terrible to receive it.'*

'Why are they glaring like that? He's just the son of a servant. So what if I pushed him off. They have no proof. Did they expect me to just let myself get swallowed up by that Abyss? Moling Su Sect? I've never heard of them. Maybe I founded my own sect-?'

"Moling Su Sect? I do not recall a sect by that name." Jiang Fengmian's question brought Su She out of his thoughts as the remaining sect leaders asked each other the same question. If Yunmeng Jiangs were to protect A-Xian, he would need to know who the enemies are.

"Su Mingshan founded his own sect based on the musical techniques and teachings of Gusu Lan in Moling with the help of Jin Guangyao after the war." Answered Lan Sizhui.

"After he was expelled from Gusu Lan for giving up additional sect secrets to Wen Xu to save his own life. It’s embarrassing when people realize he was once a Gusu Lan disciple." Lan Jingyi scoffed before throwing a disgusted look Su She’s way. All the blood drained from Su She's face. That explained the Lan's disgusted looks...

"I can’t imagine Xichen was too happy with Jin Guangyao's decision to help the traitor." Nie Mingjue commented.

"No, but it was not my place to interfere with the affairs of Lanling Jin." Zewu-jun replied.

"Why would he help a traitor build a sect?"

"Maybe he didn't know?"

"Oh! He was doing it to curry favor and gain supporters!"

"Not only was he a traitor, he's a thief too!."

"Stealing another sect's secrets and teachings to build your own sect. Despicable."

"He was willing to sacrifice someone else’s life to save his own… why are you even surprised?"

"Their horrible playing made my ears bleed once. I always carried cotton to stuff into my ears in case I ever encountered them after that." Ouyang Zizhen grimaced. The statement caused several to laugh.

"Ungrateful assbutt." Jin Ling spat out as he crossed his arms over his chest.

"Assbutt?" The cultivators mouthed to each other in confusion. Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin chuckled at their nephew. Looks like he inherited his father's awkward use of curse words.

"You may not have done all the things your future self did yet but from what we've already been shown, you were rotten even before you met Jin Guangyao." Lan Sizhui spoke up again.

Meng Yao felt the anger rolling off of the cultivator next to him. He was now curious as to what the cultivator did to gain the ire of Gusu Lan's disciplined masters and the other sects.

Indignation flared in Su She's chest. "Who do you think you are to speak about me in such a tone? Is this how you speak to your Senior! You are arrogant little pricks just like Lan Wangji! You disrespectful vermin are unworthy to even lick my boots!!"

Su She found himself lifted into the air as his neck was painfully squeezed by tendrils of resentful energy. Frantically trying to free himself from the chokehold, Su She thrashed about. A red-eyed Wei Wuxian stood before Su She with a smirk. With a flick of his wrist, Wei Wuxian sent Su She smashing into the ceiling before being slammed into the ground. Wei Ying stared at his future self with wide unbelieving eyes. *'A flick... A goddamn flick!"*

More black tendrils wrap around Su She's arms and legs to suspend him face up off the ground. Wei Wuxian's smirk grew. "I've been wanting to do this since they dropped you here."

SNAP! Su She cried out in pain as his arms were pulled outwards until they broke at the elbows.

SNAP! The cultivators flinched at the sound of bones breaking, this time at the shoulders.

"That was for disrespecting my husband."

SNAP! Another pained scream as his legs are pulled until they break at the knees.

SNAP! Phantom pains now plague the cultivators as they watch his legs break at the hips. Scared to bring the man's wrath on themselves.

"That was for calling my little ducklings vermin." Wei Wuxian threw over his shoulders as he casually walked back to his seat. "Don’t worry… there's more where that came from, saved especially for you."

Shock and fear was palpable through the hall. Wei Wuxian's display of power did not go unnoticed by Jin Guangshan who had regained consciousness when Su She hit the ceiling. This power the boy possessed… he needs it.

Lan Jingyi laughed as he crossed his arms over his chest to look down at Su She. "You are not qualified to be our senior."

"Jingyi." Lan Wangji called out, causing Lan Jingyi to halt his laughter and bow to Hanguang-jun nervously. Lan Wangji hid a smirk at Lan Jingyi's familiar rejoinder before speaking again. "Deduct 20."

"Thank you, Hanguang-jun!" Lan Jingyi happily replied as he squealed internally. ' *The Gods have heard my prayers!'* Chuckles from the Heavenly Gods made Jingyi freeze and nervously laugh. *'Oh shit… they heard me because they're right here!'*

"Su Mingshan, your actions against Wei Wuxian while he was rescuing you from the Waterborne Abyss is abhorrent. Gusu Lan does not tolerate such scheming and treacherous behaviors. Once we return, you will collect your belongings and vacate the premises. You are expelled and banished from Gusu from here on out." Lan Qiren announced. Using the scene that was still fresh on everyone's minds, this gave them the perfect validation.

"You can't banish me based on some illusions! I do not accept that ruling! You have no evidence!" Su She yelled from where he stood before his chair.

Nie Mingjue, "We as a whole have accepted that the events depicted here are in fact true. Qinghe Nie will support Lan-xiansheng's ruling."

Jin Zixuan, "Lanling Jin will also support Lan-xiansheng's ruling."

Jiang Fengmian, "Yunmeng Jiang also supports Lan-xiansheng's ruling. Su She is also banished from Yunmeng Jiang for the attempt to harm our Head Disciple." For once, Yu Ziyuan was in agreement with banishment only because she refuses to allow the schemer to step foot on their land.

Su She slumps in pain and defeat as the remaining sect leaders all offer their support alongside the Great Sects. Meng Yao remained silent as he continued to study everyone in the hall. His father was once again slumped over in his seat but his wounds didn't seem to be healing.

Nodding his head in approval to his counterpart, Lan-xiansheng continued to explain. "It wasn't until A-Ling returned A-Xian's notes that we began to form a plan."

A-Ling? Just how close was everyone in this future of theirs? Even the no-nonsense Lan-xiansheng is calling the Jin boy so intimately.

Perking up at the mention of his notes, Wei Ying turned excitedly to Wei Wuxian. "Notes? You wrote notes about time travel?" Before Wei Wuxian could answer, Wei Ying turned to Lan-xiansheng. "You used Big Me’s notes to make the array? How many tries did it take? What elements did you include? How long does the array last for?"

Lan-xiansheng shook his head in amusement as the time travelers and Immortals laughed at Wei Ying's eagerness and questioning. Lan Zhan pulled Wei Ying’s sleeve to pull him back down into his chair.

Wei Wuxian sighed, "Those notes were the ramblings of a mad man writing like he was running out of time. Most of it shouldn't have existed in the first place. So much could have been avoided if I had taken the time to properly shield them from outsiders."

“You are so much like your mother that I sometimes forget that Wei Changze was your father. While your mother easily forgives and forgets, your father internalizes his emotions and hurts. Taking blame when it was not his to take.” Lan-xiansheng spoke softly. Jiang Fengmian took a breath in to steady himself as he knew the following conversation will be a hard one.

Lan-xiansheng, "Yes, they should have been shielded and some shouldn't have even existed. The fact that you had all that knowledge and the power to carry it out in revenge but never did is proof of your character. As we will all see… that same knowledge in another's hand almost brought an end to the cultivation world due to their greed."

Jin Ling. "After the events at the Guanyin Temple, I began to clear out the Treasure Room at Jinling Tai. There were artifacts and records that dated back to Jin Guangshan's time as Sect Leader. When I found Da-jiu's notes, I also found Jin Guangyao's notes on their… experiments. Although they were written in his hand, they were all approved with Jin Guangshan's seal. He had ordered them even before the Sunshot Campaign had ended. Lists of names, ages, and genders. Torture methods. Amounts of deaths. Causes of those deaths. The level of pain exacted. Most of them were Wens but several were beggars they plucked from the street or slaves they bought from traffickers. All because they wanted the power that Da-jiu possessed. I had never been more disgusted to be called a Jin."

The more Jin Ling spoke, the angrier everyone became. The level of depravity was staggering. This was a Sect Leader of one of the Great Sects. Someone of means and power.

This, however, got them thinking it was a curse to be amongst one of the Great Sects. Lan-zongzhu secluded himself and his wife away even before their kids were born. The reason behind it was still a mystery to everyone including the Lan disciples themselves. Elder Nie-zongzhu suspiciously suffered a Qi Deviation during a night hunt and was killed by the beast when his saber broke. The same saber Sect Leader Wen touched earlier that week. It is rumored all the Sect Leaders of Qinghe Nie died or will die from Qi Deviation.

Jiang-zongzhu silently endures his wife's criticisms and insecurities. He turns a blind eye towards his children and the unjust abuse of his ward while also showing favoritism towards him. Sect Leader Wen is merciless, power hungry, and just about declared war against everyone. His power as Chief Cultivator went to his head and he craved more.

But the worst of them all had to be Jin-zongzhu. If they're to believe what they're being shown, then he has also raped and abused women of all status and ranks. Jin-zongzhu ordered the torture and murders of countless innocent lives for a dangerous power that did not belong to him.

If this was what it meant to be a Great Sect, their small mundane lives were far more appealing and safe.

Jin Zixuan, "Would you be able to give me a list of what you found and where they would be located? It will help your Nainai and I deal with the Sect Elders when we return."

Jin Ling nodded but Jiang Wanyin spoke before he could continue. "The Elders are aware of everything, do not let them convince you otherwise. After the second assassination attempt on his life, I refused to allow Jin Ling to be at Jinling Tai without me. He lived at Lotus Pier until his 10th birthday. Looking back on it later, I realized Jin Guangyao was too eager and accommodating to have A-Ling off his hands."

"A-Li and A-Ling will never have to fear for their lives at Jinling Tai. I will rid that place of every snake. Family or not, Lanling Jin will not fall to depravity." Jin Zixuan angrily

announced. Realizing what he had called Jiang Yanli, he sputtered as Yanli giggled.

Ouyang Zizhen and Lan Jingyi shook their heads. Ouyang Zizhen clicked his tongue, "They are definitely father and son…"

"Mn."

"Using your notes on Empathy and time disbursement as well as your more recent findings on the functions of the Mo Incense Burner, we had intended to pull the past cultivators who had a deep connection to you into a dream-like state to present them with the events of the future." Lan-xiansheng carried on.

Wei Wuxian hid his red face against his husband's chest as Lan Wangji's lip twitched slightly upwards. Wei Wuxian's face grew even more red as Lan Wangji bent his head to whisper in his ear. Now, Wei Ying is intrigued. *'Mo Incense Burner, huh?"*

Zewu-jun, "Even if they didn't believe what they saw, at least they will be given a seed of doubt should events play out as they did before. At least for myself, I knew it would have been. However, hearing others' thoughts and… fantasies, were not part of the array. Neither was it meant to bring anyone that didn't have a deep connection with A-Xian. We don't know what changed."

"That would be our doing. Though we didn't factor in the…uh... private moments." Baoshan Sanren spoke up. "Taizi Dianxia, Hua Chengzhu, and I wanted to right the wrongs that fell upon A-Ying. To give him a chance at a better life."

"As we said earlier, we found the array in Qishan." Explained Xie Lian. "After studying the array, we concluded that the array was meant to send those who were connected to A-Ying in the past into a confined space to be shown memories of their future."

Hua Cheng, "We made several modifications to the array to bring their future selves into the confinement and viewing as well. Jiang-guniang and the Wen's deaths weighed heavily on A-Ying. We knew he would appreciate seeing them alive again."

Ling Wen, "Using the scrolls we had at Ling Wen's Palace regarding arrays, the Heavenly Officials searched to find ways to make things as safe as possible with no negative impacts to your Golden Cores unless specifically altered by a Taizi Dianxia or Hua Chengzhu."

Unease filtered through the hall as the Cultivators witnessed Crimson Rain's smirk grow wide at the last statement. It was then that they remembered he and Blackwater had left and came back a few times.

"Did...Did they make adjustments to the array? Is that why my Golden Core isn't healing my arm?" Asked Yu Ziyuan even though she already knew the answer.

"Yes. A-Ying can't be the only one suffering all the pain by himself now can he?" Hua Cheng replied in a bored tone. The Immortals only smirked as realization dawned on the cultivators. If their Golden Cores were rendered useless in healing, they will have to rely on Wen-yishi to heal them. It'll be better to stay in her good graces then!

Lan Zhan frowned in concern. "Will Wei Ying's injuries not heal either then?"

"No, if anything his healing had sped up the last time I checked his bandaging. As if he's connected to his future self's Golden Core and it's aiding the healing process" Wen Qing replied to Lan Zhan's relief. Wen Qing eyed Wei Wuxian again, still trying to wrap her mind around it.

"Cangse had been working on several theories regarding time disbursement so when I saw that element in the array, I knew A-Ying had the same ideas as his mother." Baoshan Sanren said as she watched her grandsons perk up at their mother's name.

Wei Wuxian, "A-Niang theorized about time as well? Was she theorizing on how to improve Empathy and Inquiry as well? What about counteracting the effects of resentful energies on naturally occurring precious metals? Do you think I can get any of her notes? I would love to pick her brains about some of my theories!"

Chuckling at her grandson, Baoshan Sanren pulled a package from her sleeves. "I knew you would want your mother's notes, they are yours to keep."

Both Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian ran up to Baoshan Sanren and reverently took the package from her before returning to their seats to go through the notes.

Nie Huaisang, "So, Xichen-ge and Lan-xiansheng came up with the array using Wei-xiong's notes. Then Taizi Dianxia, Hua Chengzhu, and Baoshan Sanren altered it using Wei-xiong's mother's notes."

Without realizing it, his younger self was giving himself away. He was now too invested in the mystery to hide his intellect behind his fan. Nie Mingjue was looking at his younger brother with new eyes if the incredulous look on his face was any indication.

The Head Shaker smirked at Nie Huaisang. "Not realizing the array was changed, Xichen-ge and Shufu sent us and the boys to Qishan under the guise of a night hunt. When we got close enough, the array activated and brought us here."

Nie Huaisang, "So that means the second array appeared when that one activated? But Wei-xiong saw it even before the archery competition started. Was there a delay somehow?"

Wei Wuxian, "It may have taken the array a while to pinpoint me in the past considering I was in a different body with a different Golden Core. It would have had to search out a secondary anchor tied to my soul that existed in both timelines…" His voice trailed as his eyes met Jiang Wangyin's. Oh. "Well now that we know how we got here… let's go back to the viewing so we can get out sooner!"

Noticing Wei Wuxian's sudden drop of the topic, the Immortals narrowed their eyes. The future cultivators all had varying looks of discomfort and regret on their faces. Curious.

Jin Ling, "But wait though… I returned his notes ages ago. Why now?"

Zewu-jun looked to his uncle before Lan-xiansheng spoke. "Though our bonds have been healing, there was still a sense that things were not completely right. A-Xian was never his true self in front of anyone but Wangji or the boys. Xichen and I have only caught glimpses of the carefree boy he used to be when they thought no one else was around."

Zewu-jun, "Though Wangji said he forgave us, he was colder and more unyielding in front of the Elders. They had hurt him and Shufu and I had allowed it to happen. My blind trust in someone I considered a sworn brother over the words of my own brother destroyed the unconditional trust Wangji had in me. We would give up anything to erase their pains and hurts."

' Wangji has learned how far your respect and love for me extended three decades ago.' Lan Xichen was shocked to hear the extent his relationship with his brother had deteriorated but Wangji's words rang loud in his mind. *'Huaisang said I believed Jin Guangyao's words over his and Wangji's. Could it be…?'*

Sparing a glance at Meng Yao, Lan Xichen spoke to his future self, "You said you took the words of your sworn brother over that of Wangji's. What was it regarding?"

Zewu-jun closed his eyes as if answering the question pained him. "Huaisang and Wangji did not believe the rumors regarding A-Xian's… change in cultivation and temperament. Though Wangji was confused and frustrated with not being able to help, he believed A-Xian's actions had valid reasons. They both pleaded with Da-ge and I to not believe the lies. To go see the truth for ourselves. Wangji was more concerned that the resentful energy was wreaking havoc on his body and heart than A-Xian hurting others. But I chose to believe someone I thought would never lie to me."

Lan Xichen, "And my… our sworn brother?"

Zewu-jun froze for a moment as he looked towards Nie Mingjue and Meng Yao. He had refused to look their way as it hurt to see them alive before him. One he unknowingly helped kill and the other he stabbed with *Shouyue.* Nie Mingjue caught the flash of pain that crossed Zewu-jun's features. His eyebrows furrowed as he ran through the words his brother spoke of earlier.

Zewu-jun, "He perpetrated those rumors."

"And Da-ge? What did he do?" Nie Huaisang reluctantly asked. He was afraid of what the answer would be.

"His resentment of the Wen surname blinded him from believing there were any truly innocent lives nor those who were threatened into submission. He refused to hear anything in defense of Wei Wuxian. The only person who knew me and accepted me anyway. I refused to speak to Da-ge for months after he returned from the siege of the Burial Mounds. He had helped to kill my best friend. He refused to listen to his own brother and condemned an innocent man to his death without even trying to find all the facts!" The Head Shaker screamed.

"A-Sang…" Wei Wuxian tried to comfort his sworn brother. Jiang Wanyin walked over to place a hand on his shoulder.

"Jin Guangyao's incitement caused a further rift between us. After Jin Guangyao *oh so graciously* sent us a gift of new brushes, Da-ge went into a rage and broke all of our brushes and paints before setting them ablaze. My hands were severely burnt for several weeks because of that." The Head Shaker calmly recounted to Nie Mingjue and Nie Huaisang's horror.

Meng Yao turned his attention to the older Nie Huaisang. Why would he try to cause a rift between the two brothers? Unless… his father had ordered it.

Nie Mingjue knew his hatred for the Wens stemmed from Wen Rouhan's discreet murder of his father. He had vowed vengeance and retribution on the Wen dogs the day of his father's funeral. He trained harder and pushed his limits further. He could feel the rage building up more each day and he trained. It was only a matter of time before a Qi Deviation would take him but not before he ends Wen Ruohan. Older Huaisang's words felt like cold water being dumped on him. He had allowed his anger to control him. To allow innocent people to die just for their last name. Even the Wens were not that heartless to kill innocent children for their surname.

Shaken by everything he just heard, Lan Xichen's voice quivered, "How could one man cause so much turmoil? What could have made us trust his words so irrevocably?"

"Shufu forced me to flee with the ancient texts and scrolls while Wangji defended the Library Pavilion when the Wens broke through our wards. He was conveniently there as I escaped and sheltered me until I returned to jumpstart the Sunshot Campaign. He further gained my trust when he "risked" his life to spy on the Wens and pass information to us." Zewu-jun recounted.

"He preyed on your kindness and took advantage of your willingness to see the good in others, A-Huan" spat Jiang Wanyin.

"He did, A-Cheng. But my actions were my own." Zewu-jun sent him a soft smile.

Wei Ying and Jiang Cheng’s eyes widened at their casual endearment. Suddenly Wei Ying let out a gasp, pulling everyone's attention to him and a red faced Jiang Cheng.

"OH MY GOD!!!!!"

In The Hot Seat

Chapter Summary

Wanyin and Xichen sitting in a tree...

It's a scorcher, guys...

Hua Cheng did what now?

Chapter Notes

Next update should be up by Saturday!

Jiang Cheng slapped a hand over Wei Ying's mouth to stop the words threatening to spill out of his mouth.

"Mmm mmph m mmmmph mm mmh mmpmph!"

You Have a crush on Lan Xichen!

"Shut up, Wei Wuxian!"

"Mmm mmph hmh!"

You love him!

"I said shut the fuck up, Wei Wuxian!"

"Mmhh mmmh mmph mmm m mmh mph?"

Does that make you a Lan too?

"Wei Wuxian, I swear to God if you do not shut the fuck up-" Jiang Cheng suddenly shrieked and pulled his hand from Wei Ying's mouth. "Why the fuck did you lick my hand!?!?!"

Chuckles pulled the boys' attention back to the others in the hall to see the past cultivators looking at them confused. Jiang Yanli was chuckling into her sleeve with a knowing glint in her eyes. The time travelers were out right falling over laughing. Jiang Wanyin's face was red as he huffed and crossed his arms.

"Shall we return to the viewing, husband?" Asked Zewu-jun. Internally cooing at his red-faced husband.

HUSBAND!?!?!?

Jiang Cheng sputtered and mumbled quietly under his breath,
"Hus...husband...who'syourhusband?"

Wei Wuxian burst out laughing at his younger brother. "Xichen-ge… I think you broke him! Look at how red his face is!"

"Poor Chengcheng won't ever recover if you continue to tease him." Joked Wei Ying.

"Will you both shut the fuck up and watch! A-Huan, stop encouraging them!" Jiang Wanyin snapped. Zewu-jun chuckled in amusement as Lan Xichen watched their interaction.
'Ah...now I understand now.'

"Is this why Wangji is currently the Acting Sect Leader?" Lan Xichen asked Zewu-jun.

"We spend a third of the year in Cloud Recesses and another third at Lotus Pier. When I am at Lotus Pier, Wangji takes over as Acting Sect Leader and Sizhui assists him. And when A-Cheng is at the Cloud Recesses, A-Xian takes over as Acting Sect Leader in Yunmeng with Jin Ling to assist him. The remaining months in between Wangji and A-Xian travel and go on night hunts."

"You allow that boy to run the sect in your absence?!?! He caused its destruction and you still give him free reign of the sect? How stupid could you be?!?!" Yu Ziyuan shouted.

"A-Niang, Wei Wuxian is my second heir. Why wouldn't he have free reign to the sect?" Jiang Wanyin watched his mother’s reaction carefully.

"HE'S YOUR WHAT?!?!?"

"Jin Ling and Wei Wuxian are my heirs. Jin Ling has taken over Lanling Jin so that leaves Wei Wuxian as my heir until Xichen and I adopt a child or Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji adopt another kid as A-Zhui is the Gusu Lan hier." Jiang Wanyin explained, not leaving room for debate.

Yu Ziyuan slumps down into her seat. "The Jiang bloodline…"

"Flows through Jin Ling as much as the Jin blood does. As will any other children A-Jie will have." Jiang Wanyin's tone indicated the topic was settled.

"As Jin Ling will be the Jin's heir, A-Jie's second born will be my heir alongside Wei Wuxian." Jiang Cheng announced, ignoring his mother's scowl.

Jin Zixuan looked to Jiang Yanli to find her smiling fondly at her brothers. "That is acceptable with Lanling Jin."

"I am proud of you, A-Cheng." Jiang Fengmian spoke up at last, shocking both Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Cheng. "Yunmeng Jiang will accept any child you decide as their future leader."

"Fengmian! You-" Yu Ziyuan tried to reason but Jiang Fengmian held up his hand to stop her.

"Gusu Lan accepted an adopted child as its heir. Yunmeng Jiang will not be close-minded and unwilling to adapt to the changes in the world around us. It goes against what we stand for. A-Li's children are also Jiangs no matter their last name. My children's happiness is all that matters." Jiang Fengmian declared.

"Well said, Jiang-zongzhu." Lan Qiren praised. "My nephews' happiness is most important. I will handle the Elders when the time comes. They will never get the chance to lay a hand on my nephews. Though after this, I'm sure they will no longer be an issue."

"No, they won't be." Smirked Wei Wuxian.

Nie Mingjue eyed the older Nie Huaisang and Wen Qionglin. "Do you have anything to tell me since we're on the topic? Are you and Wen Qionglin together?"

"DA-GE!!!!!!" Both shouted in response as laughter broke out. Wen Qing glanced at her flustered brother out of the corner of her eye before turning her attention to his older self. Though his face was unable to express extreme expressions, his eyes were still opened wide as he shook his head in denial.

'You have no idea...' The Head Shaker mentally laughed.

"Let's return to the viewing before they start pairing everyone up." Joked Wei Wuxian as everyone moved to return to their seats.

Time sped forward as the image filtered through daylight and nighttime over the water.

A boat once again treads through the lotus filled water. Jiang Wanyin sits at the bow of the boat looking out into the water. Passing through a dense section of lotus leaves, something catches his eye. Leaning over the side of the boat, he narrows his eyes in suspicion at a body floating face down.

"I thought everyone in Yunmeng knew how to swim?" Asked Nie Mingjue.

"They do." Jiang Wanyin replied in a tired tone and Wei Ying snickered.

The image focuses on the black robes of the floating body as Jiang Wanyin, not even blinking an eye at the fact that there was a body in the water, pokes his sword into its back. When he receives no reaction back, he leans further over the side of the boat to poke the side of the body.

Jin Ling. "You… why did you just poke the body like it was nothing?!?!" Jiang Cheng just shrugged.

One second Jiang Wanyin is leaning over the side of his boat, the next he's fallen back into the boat, drenched head to toe.

A cackling Wei Wuxian hangs onto the side of the boat. "Welcome home Shidi!"

"WEI WUXIAN!!!!!!"

"Is it always like this with those two?" Jin Zixuan asked in between bursts of laughter.

Jiang Yanli giggled and nodded, "Sometimes they do worse."

Thin clouds drifted past mountain peaks as the sun settled higher in the sky. Bird song accompanied by the sounds of running water enhance the quiet and serenity of the Cloud Recesses.

Two white robed figures stood motionless and upside down on one hand in meditation before the Lanshi.

Ouyang Zizhen, "Woah… how long do you think they've been in that position for?"

Lan Sizhui, "Hanguang-jun does handstands to train and meditate for hours on end. I've joined him in these sessions since I turned 6." Those moments were amongst several that Sizhui cherished since his father's movements were still limited due to his injuries growing up.

Ouyang Zizhen, "No wonder you guys have insane arm strength!"

Lan Jingyi, "Of course! It doesn't just happen on its own, you know!"

'Let me tell you, Lan Zhan! Lotus pods with stems have better seeds than those without.'
The memory of Wei Wuxian's words pulled Lan Wangji out of his meditation.

"Xiongzhang."

"Yes, Wangji?"

Lan Xichen patiently waited for his brother to gather his thoughts. After a moment, Lan Wangji asked, "Have you picked lotus seed pods before?"

Unsure where the thought had come from, Lan Xichen looked at him before answering, "…No. If you want to eat lotus seeds, we can send for them. There's no need to pick the pods ourselves."

As if contemplating whether or not he wanted to send for some seeds, Lan Wangji tilted his head downward, "Xiongzhang, did you know…"

Zewu-jun tilted his head towards Lan Wangji in silent questioning when he let the question hang in the air.

Lan Wangji, "...Lotus pods with stems have better seeds than those without?"

"You believed him?" Jiang Wanyin asked incredulously.

Jiang Yanli giggled before putting on a serious face, "A-Xian, you shouldn't be telling people such things."

Wei Ying pouted, "But it does taste better!"

"That's the excuse you use to steal them from the old man." Jiang Cheng scoffed.

Lan Xichen's eyes shone with amusement as he listened to his brother. "Oh? That's not something I've ever heard of. What makes you ask all of a sudden?"

Lan Wangji, "It's nothing. Time to switch to the other hand."

Effortlessly switching hands, the brothers once again resumed their handstands. Zewu-jun angled his head to look at his brother to continue their conversation when something caught his eye and made him smile. "Wangji, you have a guest."

A black rabbit hopped its way down the wooden hall towards the brothers. Twitching its nose, the rabbit made its way to Lan Wangji and cuddled close to his hand.

"Lan Zhan! You kept them?" An excited Wei Ying asked.

"Mn."

Lan Sizhui, "There's a whole section in the back hills filled with them now."

"But they're both males! Where did the others come from?!?!" Wei Ying asked.

"Xiongzhang." Lan Zhan replied.

Zewu-jun, "How did it find its way here?"

"Go back." Lan Wangji told the tiny explorer.

Ignoring the command, the rabbit nipped at one end of Lan Wangji's forehead ribbon and pulled it as if it wanted to drag Lan Wangji away with it.

An amused Lan Xichen commented, "Perhaps it wants your company."

Seeing that Lan Wangji was not moving, the rabbit circled around him erratically. Once again amused at the rabbit's behavior. Lan Xichen asked, "Is this the boisterous one?"
'Just like the one who gifted it.'

Ouyang Zizhen laughed, "It really is like Wei-qianbei!"

Lan Wangji let out a small exasperated sigh, "Mn."

Lan Xichen, "There's no harm in being boisterous. It's adorable. There should be two of them, correct? The two are often together, why has only one of them come? Does the other prefer the quiet as opposed to adventuring outside?" ***'Like its owner.'***

"It will come." said Lan Wangji with a small smile.

As if summoned by his words, the white rabbit came into view as it hopped down the hallway in search of its rambunctious companion. The two chased each other until they settled down beside each other next to Lan Wangji's hand.

Lan Jingyi laughed along with his friends, "They really are just like Wei-qianbei and Hanguang-jun!"

Lan Xichen, 'What are their names?'

Lan Wangji shook his head. It seems he had no intention of telling Lan Xichen their names.

"I accidentally heard you call them by their names last time. They have lovely names." Lan Xichen chuckled as his brother's ears turned red.

"What did you name them?" Wei Ying asked, causing Lan Zhan's ears to turn red.

"Xiao Ying." Lan Wangji's eyes glisten with amusement at Lan Zhan's betrayed glare. "And Xiao Lan."

Snickers came from the younger boys as a blush forms on Wei Ying's face. Jiang Wanyin and The Head Shaker pretended to vomit while Jiang Yanli and Nie Huaisang chuckled.

In the Lanshi, the Lan brothers are seated before a tray of assorted fruits. As they exchanged quiet words regarding their day and their lessons, Lan Wangji's attention caught on the slices of watermelon in the tray.

'Goodness Lan Zhan! Your sect's food is terrible. I'd rather eat fried watermelon rind with chilies.'

"Wei Wuxian! Gusu Lan Sect's food is meant to be healthy and beneficial to your body! You-!" Lan Qiren shook his finger at Wei Ying.

"A small amount of spices added while cooking will not make the meals less beneficial. There has been less curfew breaking by the guest disciples having to go to Caiyi for their meals since we added spices." Lan-xiansheng interrupted. Leaving a flabbergasted Lan Qiren and a thoughtful Lan Xichen.

Lan Xichen brought a slice of watermelon to his mouth, however, he stopped when he noticed Lan Wangji staring at the plate.

"Xiongzhang."

"Yes, Wangji?"

Lan Wangji, "Have you eaten watermelon rind before?"

Jiang Cheng groaned and slapped his forehead. " Wei Wuxian… you're an idiot."

"..." confused, Lan Xichen asked, "...is watermelon rind edible?"

After a moment of silence, Lan Wangji answered, "Mn, I heard it can be stir-fried."

At a loss for words, Lan Xichen spoke. "Perhaps it can…"

Jiang Yanli, "Perhaps you can pickle it or candy it. I will make it for A-Xian to try one day"

Wei Ying pouted, "Shijie…"

Lan Wangji, "I heard it tastes quite good."

Lan Xichen, "I have never tried it."

Lan Wangji, "Neither have I."

"..." once again at a loss for words, Lan Xichen cautiously ventured, "Do you want the kitchen to stir-fry some for you?"

Lan Wangji looked contemplative for a moment before he replied in the negative. Lan Xichen visibly let out a sigh of relief before chuckling at his brother's behavior. *'I'm sure I know where all these questions are coming from now.'*

Jiang Cheng rubbed his temples as Jiang Fengmian smiled. "A-Xian has always been curious and childish at heart, please don't take his words too seriously Lan Er-gongzi."

"It is of no consequence." Lan Zhan replied with a bow of his head.

The viewers are brought back to Yunmeng as the sun blazes down upon the Yunmeng Jiang Dueling Hall. The air rippled with hot steam that rose from the ground. The heat felt so palpable to the viewers that it felt like the air around them rose in temperature as well.

A dozen topless boys lay atop the wooden floor boards in a corner of the Dueling Hall. Curtains lined the area and hid them from the rest of the hall as well as shielding them from the scorching sun. Doing their best imitation of scallion pancakes, they occasionally flipped themselves over before letting out dying groans.

Gasps came from female cultivators as they turned their heads away with a blush.

"Shit…" Wei Ying whispered softly under his breath. Catching Lan Zhan's attention immediately as he frowned at the boy's reaction.

Lan Wangji caught the reaction and looked to Wei Wuxian to find he had the same look as his younger self.

"It's…"

"So…"

"Hot…"

***"I wish it was as cool as the Cloud Recesses here."* Wei WuXian thought as he sprawled out amongst the boys.**

Nie Huaisang, "Didn't you say you hated it at the Cloud Recesses, Wei-xiong?"

Wei Ying, "Doesn't meant I don't miss the cooler weather, Nie-xiong."

As he flipped over, his back came into view.

The hall fell silent as all eyes landed on Wei Wuxian's back. Lan Zhan held onto Wei Ying's hand tighter to ground himself.

The Immortals were instantly on their feet and staring horrified at the image before them.

"When Wen-yishi described the injuries to Wei Wuxian's back, I hadn't imagined it to be this bad!" Shouted Nie Mingjue. Nie Huaisang silently cried by his side, unable to take his eyes off his friend's back.

Since Wei Wuxian had returned in Mo Xuanyu's body, the future cultivators had never seen the state of his original body. Seeing the rage on Lan Wangji's face, Wei Wuxian squeezed his hand and gave him a reassuring smile.

"YU ZIYUAN!" Ruoye shot from Xie Lian's arm and wrapped itself tightly around Yu Ziyuan as she cried out from the pain in her shoulder. "What kind of mother would hurt a young child!?!? A resentful ghost is a better mother than you are! What kind of monster are you?"

Yu Ziyuan is once again slammed to the ground. Before Xie Lian can do any further damage, Jiang Fengmian stepped in front of his wife. "Taizi Dianxia, please calm down! I swear to you, Yunmeng Jiang will punish my wife accordingly when we return. Please, I beg you to calm down."

"We left A-Ying in your care because we thought a family would be a better place for him than being with a Heavenly Official and a Ghost King. You allowed this to happen in your own home, Jiang Fengmian!" Hua Cheng snarled at him.

"Yunmeng Jiang's judgement can no longer be trusted." Pei Ming agreed.

Lan Qiren, "If it is acceptable to you, your highnesses, Gusu Lan and Qinghe Nie will handle Yu Ziyuan's punishment when we leave here." Nie Mingjue nodded in agreement.

"It is a private family affair. Yunmeng Jiang should be allowed to handle it within themselves!" Shouted Elder Yu-Furen.

"Meishan Yu will not interfere." Yu-zongzhu declared as he glared at his wife. "We did not raise our daughter to treat children in such a manner!"

"Very well." Reluctantly, Xie Lian released Yu Ziyuan. "We will hold you to your promise to serve justice for A-Ying."

The Gusu Lan and Qinghe Nie leaders bowed to the Immortals before returning to their seats. At this rate, everyone in the hall is going to be in deep trouble with the Gods before the viewing even ends.

Coincidentally Jiang Cheng, who had laid opposite of him, flipped over at the same time. Their arm and leg collided one on top of the other.

"Jiang Cheng, move your arm! It's like a piece of coal!"

"Move your leg!" Jiang Cheng hissed back as the two began to slap and kick each other.

Jin Zixuan watched the scene with a small ache in his heart. *'Is this how siblings act? The Lans and Nies seem to have different kinds of relationships though.'* He glanced over to Meng Yao. *'Would he turn out differently if I helped and accepted him as my brother? Should I try?'?*

The shidis all complained through the back and forth of "Fuck Off!" And "You first!".

"Stop arguing, already!"

"It gets hotter just listening to you two argue. Look! I’m even sweating faster!"

"Fight outside if you have to!"

"Please fuck off together, won’t you?"

"We’re begging you!"

Wei Wuxian, "You heard them! They’re telling you to leave!"

Jiang Cheng, "They’re clearly telling you to leave!"

Jin Ling, "Wow… you guys are worse than me and Jin Chan on a good day!"

Jin Zixuan, "Jin Chan?"

Jin Ling, "He's my cousin. Zishen-shushu's son."

Lan Jingyi snickered, "Another Jin-xiaojie."

As quickly as it started, the arguing stopped when the swishing of a dress against the wooden ground forced the boys apart as if struck by lightning. Right as the bamboo

curtains were lifted to reveal a lavender-clad Jiang Yanli carrying a tray of cut watermelon.

A collective sigh of relief rolled through the boys. Excited shouts of "Shijie!" and the shuffle of bodies getting covered up by the more shy disciples made Jiang Yanli giggle.

"At least some of them understand propriety." Mumbled Yu Ziyuan under her breath. Her face has become more pale from the pain in her shoulder. Being slammed onto the ground did not help matters.

Jiang Yanli, "No sword practice today? You're not slacking off are you?"

Wei Wuxian and the boys protested about the heat and scorching sun as they each grabbed a slice of watermelon.

Watermelon peels piled up on the plate when Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin began to compete again. Wei Wuxian was completely engaged in the eating contest until his eyes drifted towards the watermelon rinds. His memory of Lan Wangji's unamused reaction caused him to laugh out loud.

Lan Sizhui smiled as he watched his Baba on the cloth, "Even so far apart, they still have each other on their minds."

Quickly alarmed, Jiang Wanyin shot his shixiong a suspicious look. "What are you planning this time?"

Wei Wuxian laughed as he grabbed another piece, "Nothing! Don't worry! I'm not gonna do anything. I was just thinking of someone."

"Who?" Jiang Wanyin asked, still suspicious.

Wei Wuxian, "Lan Zhan."

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes at the answer. "Why are you thinking of him all of a sudden? Reminiscing copying sect rules?"

"It's fun to think of him!" Wei Wuxian spit out. "He's just too amusing to be left alone."

Lan Jingyi, "To think it took them 19 years to be together… that's a story for the books!"

Ouyang Zizhen, "Let's write their story and all the juicy details when we get back! *Romance of the Ages: Hanguang-jun and the Yiling Laozu* ."

Lan Jingyi, " *Romancing the Yiling Laozu* ."

Ouyang Zizhen, " *The Jade and his Lotus* ."

Jin Ling, "Will you two shut up? I don't need to think about my Da-jiu's love life!"

Lan Sizhui, "I'm not sure I want to read about my parents' love life either."

Nie Huaisang leaned forward to whisper to the boys, "I'd like to read it! Send one to future me if you write the story, I'm sure we'd gladly distribute it for you."

Lan Jingyi and Ouyang Zizhen looked at each other excitedly before nodding their heads at Nie Huaisang.

Wei Wuxian. "I told him his sect's food is terrible and I'd rather eat stir-fried watermelon peel with chilies. Come have fun with us at Lotus Pier, I'll take him to all the good places to eat -"

Wei Wuxian's watermelon slice was slapped from his hand before he could finish.

"Are you crazy? Why did you invite him to Lotus Pier? Are you that tired of living? Stop inviting him here!" Jiang Wanyin demanded before looking away, missing the look that flashed on his shixiong's face.

Pasting a pout on his face, Wei Wuxian cried out. "Calm down, will you? My poor watermelon! I was just being polite… we all know he wouldn't come. Have you ever heard of him going anywhere to have fun? Why are you reacting like this? I never knew you hated him so much."

Jiang Wanyin cleared his throat and shifted in his seat while Lan Wangji's eyes quickly shifted to the floor and back, making both Wei Wuxian and Zewu-jun laugh.

Jiang Wanyin, "I've got nothing against Lan Wangji. If he came, my mom would have more fuel. Comparing me with someone else's kid. You won't get away unscathed either."

Wei Wuxian slapped his shidi's back and boasted, "There's nothing to be scared of! If he does come to visit, you can tell Jiang-shushu to have him sleep with me. I'll definitely drive him mad in less than a month!"

Nie Huaisang smirked behind his fan, "My my, Wei-xiong. Already planning to hog Wangji-xiong all to yourself, huh?"

Wei Ying sputtered, "That… that wasn't what I meant!"

Jiang Wanyin laughed, "You want him to sleep with you for an entire month? You'd be stabbed to death within the week!"

Nie Mingjue laughed, "Or he might enjoy it!"

"Not until AFTER you are married!" Hua Cheng spoke through clenched teeth.

Wei Wuxian waved away the idea, "I'm not scared of him! If we're seriously fighting, he might not even be a match for me!"

Jiang Wanyin observed his shixiong while the others cheered him on before mocking his thick skin. As infuriating as it was, Wei Wuxian wasn't just boasting without the skills to back it up.

Lan Xichen, "Wei-gongzi's skills are something to behold."

The others agreed. Just from what they've seen, Wei Wuxian definitely has the skills to back up all his boasting.

Jiang Yanli sat down between the two when they began to shove each other again. "Who are you two talking about? A friend you made in Gusu?"

Wei Wuxian gave his shijie a bright smile, "Yeah!"

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes, "What a shameless 'friend'. Go ask Lan Wangji if he wants you as his friend."

Faking outrage, Wei Wuxian gasped out loud. "Fuck off. I'll bother him until he wants to be my friend. Shijie, do you know Lan Wangji?"

"Who doesn't know Lan Wangji?" mumbled Jiang Cheng under his breath.

"Mn. We are friends." Lan Zhan said as he looked at a smiling Wei Ying.

Jiang Yanli, "I do. Lan Er-gongzi is described by everyone as handsome and talented. Is he really that handsome?"

"He is!" Replied Wei Wuxian without hesitation.

Jiang Yanli raised one eyebrow at his response, "Compared to you?"

Wei Wuxian's face became serious as he thought about it for a moment before using his thumb and forefinger to indicate a pinch. "Maybe just a *little* bit more handsome than me."

"Mn. Closer than friends." Lan Wangji nonchalantly added. Wei Wuxian cackled as Lan Zhan and Wei Ying once again flushed red.

Jiang Yanli smiled and took the plate of peels away, "He must be very handsome then. It's good that you made a new friend. You two can visit each other in your free time."

Seeing her brothers' faces in response to the idea of going back to Gusu Lan, Jiang Yanli giggled. "Why not invite your friend to come stay at Lotus Pier for a while?"

Jiang Wanyin, "Don't listen to his nonsense, A-jie. He already offended half of the Cloud Recesses. Lan Wangji would never want to come visit him."

Wei Wuxian, "I don't know what you're talking about! He will come!"

Jiang Wanyin, "Wake up, will you? Lan Wangji told you to get lost, or did you forget?"

Wei Wuxian, "What do you know!? I know for sure he secretly wants to come visit with me here. As a matter of fact, he would love to!"

"I did come visit. Yunmeng is beautiful." Lan Zhan explained.

Wei Ying pouted, "Lan Zhan! Why didn't you come find me! I would have taken you around the place!"

Lan Zhan, "Did not stay long. There was a rain storm."

Jiang Wanyin, "I have to ask myself everyday just where do you find all this confidence?"

Wei Wuxian, "Aiya… Stop thinking about it. If I asked the same question for so many years and never got an answer, I would've given up a long time ago."

Jiang Wanyin shook his head and prepared to retort when the sounds of aggressive footsteps drained the color from all the boys' faces.

"I was wondering where everyone disappeared to. As expected…" a stern voice sneered.

Arms and legs flailed as they ran out from behind the curtains and into the hall just as Yu Ziyuan turned the corner.

Eyebrows raised in question. Were they really that terrified if Yu Ziyuan?

***'Oh shit…'* thought the disciples as they spun on their heels and ran in terror. The scowl, now familiar to all the viewers, on her face morphed into anger as she took in the undressed state of the disciples.**

"You boys! Can't you see that A-Li's here? Who taught you brats to dress like this in front of a lady?!?!?"

The elder female cultivators grunted and nodded in agreement. Martial siblings or not, they still needed to dress properly when a lady was present.

"Jiang Cheng! Put some clothes on! You look like a barbarian! What would people think of me if they saw you walking around like this?!?!?"

Jiang Wanyin hastily untied his top from around his waist and pulled it on while the boys scrambled to grab their tops. Yu Ziyuan's ire suddenly turned to Wei Wuxian.

"Wei Ying! Do you want to die!?"

Pei Ming, "So others get yelled at for being dressed indecently. But A-Ying gets threatened?"

Ling Wen, "A bit of an extreme contrast, if you ask me."

Wei Wuxian flinched, "I'm sorry, Madam Yu! I didn't know Shijie would come looking for us! I'll go get changed right now!"

Yu Ziyuan became even angrier, "You dare run? Come back right now and kneel!"

Purple bursts of lightning slashed across the screen.

A pained scream ripped through the hall as the viewers' horrified eyes focused on Yu Ziyuan's trembling form on the ground before them. Purple streaks begin to appear on Yu Ziyuan's back. Before anyone could react, their attention is pulled back to the cloth by a muted grunt.

Wei Wuxian stumbled but caught himself as streaks of purple lightning branched out from a large slash running diagonally on his back.

One by one, the viewers realized what just happened. The injuries that Wei Wuxian received on the cloth were reflected on the person inflicting the injuries.

Hua Cheng smirked as he looked down at Yu Ziyuan. "I altered the array to share A-Ying's pain with those who caused him said pain with ill-intent. So every whip, every lashing, every injury… you will feel it too."

Wei Wuxian shared a look with Jiang Wanyin. They both knew what was coming.

"A-Die… you said that the pain will be inflicted only if the person had ill-intent, right?" Wei Wuxian asked before meeting Wen Qionglin's wide eyes.

"Yes." Replied Hua Cheng.

"If it was something necessary and I asked for it to be done, then the person won't feel the pain… right?" Wei Ying asked as Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji finally realized why they were asking.

"Why do you ask?" Now suspicious, Hua Cheng asked.

"Just… just wondering." Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying answered in unison. Not meeting anyone's eyes.

Narrowing his eyes at both boys, Hua Cheng confirmed once again, "As long as the person is not causing you harm with malicious intentions, they will not feel pain."

Wei Wuxian let out a breath and smiled, "Ok… good. That's good."

Now all the Immortals and past cultivators are eyeing Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying with suspicion.

"I want A-Ying removed from Yunmeng. Whether it is to Qinghe or Gusu or a split between the two, it does not matter. The Jiang siblings can be allowed to visit." Xie Lian demanded.

Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli wanted to protest but they knew this was something that had to be done if their future was to be changed for the better.

"But-" Wei Ying began to protest.

"It's for the best Little Me, you know that." Wei Wuxian cut him off.

"I know… Can Lan Zhan come with me if I go to Qinghe for a short time?" Wei Ying asked Lan Qiren.

Lan Qiren, "If you wish to split your time between Qinghe and Gusu, as long as Nie-zongzhu is amenable to it, I will allow it."

Nie Mingjue, "I'll have a room prepared for Wei Wuxian when we return."

"A-Ying and Lan Wangji will be in separate rooms or so help me, I will tear your sects apart!" Hua Cheng threatened.

"I.. what? Why would we be sharing a room? We… he…it's not.." Wei Ying once again sputtered.

"They will be in separate rooms and chaperoned appropriately, Chengzhu." Nie Mingjue bowed to hide his grin as Lan Xichen turned his head to hide his behind a cough.

"Give them the first set of rooms on the right in the Family Wing." The Head Shaker smirked behind his fan when Nie Huaisang's eyes lit up with mischief. The rooms in the Family Wing are connected by a door disguised as a bookshelf.

"I will be dropping in occasionally to ensure things are being properly handled." Feng Xin stated with a disgusted look towards Yu Ziyuan.

"As will I." Mu Qing stated.

"Don’t expect any of the Jiang ships to return until I am satisfied with your punishment." He Xuan turned away and sat back down at the table.

Yu Ziyuan flicked *Zidian* back to unleash another strike.

"A-Niang, do you want some watermelon…?"

Stopping in her forward movement, Yu Ziyuan looked at Jiang Yanli in confusion.

Lan Jingyi, "Looks like Jiang-guniang's skills could work on just about anyone!"

Ouyang Zizhen sighed, "If only I can find someone like her back home!"

The distraction gave the boys a chance to run and make themselves sparse. Realizing what her daughter was doing she pinched her cheek, "Eat, eat, eat. All you do is cook and eat!"

Fighting back tears from the pain in her cheek, Jiang Yanli mumbled. "A-Niang, A-Xian and the others were hiding here to relieve the heat before I came here to find them. They didn't do it on purpose. Do… Do you want some watermelon? Eating watermelon in the summer is great for cooling down and quenching thirst. I’ll cut them for you. I don’t know who gave them to us but it’s really sweet."

Flicking her eyes between the plate of rinds and her daughter, Yu Ziyuan's anger grew and she crossed her arms over her chest. The more Jiang Yanli spoke about watermelon, the more she craved it.

Wei Ying chuckled, "No one can resist the call of a watermelon! Especially in the sweltering heat!"

To Hit The Target With A Bow And Arrow

Chapter Summary

Yunmeng Twin Prides sees their Gusu Twin Jades in red.

When WiFi met his Cinnamon Roll.

Tell us about your wedding! ... what wedding?

Chapter Notes

Guys guys guys!!!!

We've surpassed 3K Kudos! Believe me when I say that your comments and constructive criticisms have carried me through this far.

I absolutely LOVE the discussions we have in the comment section and hope that they continue.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The hall remained silent as they watched Wei Ying with shocked expressions. They're watching him being punished unfairly yet he's here making jokes like it didn't matter. If this happened to them, would they still be able to don a happy expression?

Jin Zixuan's hands fisted in his lap. He had to force himself to not snap at his future mother-in-law for her rough treatment of her daughter. When he felt a small hand covering his fist, he looked up to see a smiling Jiang Yanli.

"You're perfect the way you are." The words left his lips before he realized what he was saying. His heart, however, flipped as a blush bloomed on her face.

“Perhaps the gates of the Cloud Recesses should be opened to A-Xian’s siblings should they ever need it. Regardless of their surname.” Lan-xiansheng suggested with a side glance to his younger counterpart.

“That’s a great idea, Shufu!” Zewu-jun cheered as he shot Wei Wuxian a smile.

Something in Lan-xiansheng’s wording caught Lan Xichen’s attention. “Regardless of...surname?”

“As you have all witnessed, A-Xian has an uncanny ability to… gain…new family members.” Zewu-jun chuckled.

Lan Sizhui smiled, “I’ve stopped keeping count on how many uncles, aunts, grandparents, and siblings I've gained over the years.”

“We… We will consider it after this viewing concludes.” Lan Qiren compromised. He still could not come to terms with his future self’s close relationship nor how acquiescent he was to Wei Wuxian’s suggestions. What exactly happened for him to so willingly trust the troublemaker?

"Wait. Wait. Wait!" Wei Ying raised a hand before turning to Lan Sizhui. "Did you say siblings?"

Realization bloomed on Lan Sizhui's face. "Oh…"

Wei Ying turned to Lan Jingyi. "You heard him say siblings, right? Siblings. As in more than 1?"

Lan Jingyi, "Uh, Wei-qianbei…"

“Speaking of uncles.” Baoshan Sanren suddenly stood from her seat and called out, “Xingchen. Zichen. Shouldn’t you come to greet your nephew?”

From the back, two figures stood and walked towards the front as the cultivators turned their attention to them. The two unknown cultivators stopped before Baoshan Sanren and bowed.

“Xingchen greets Master.”

“Zichen greets Master.”

The younger time travelers stood from their seats when their seniors stood. The last time they saw either Daozhangs, one was a fierce corpse with his tongue cut out and the other’s soul was shattered beyond repair.

Song Lan turned to Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji before he and Xiao Xingchen bowed to them in greeting. “Wei-gongzi, Lan Er-gongzi. It is good to meet you again in happier circumstances.”

Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji shared a shocked glance before returning the Daozhang’s bow. “You… You remember us? How?” Wei Wuxian asked.

“Master felt the pull of my spirit when she last descended. She found Zichen and brought him back to her mountain. Since we were on Master’s mountain, locked in a healing meditation, the energy of the mountain altered how we were pulled back here by the array and pulled our souls into our past bodies instead.” Xiao Xingchen explained as he gave Wei Wuxian a smile.

"Then when we leave here, will you return to your own timeline or will you be remaining in your past bodies?" Wei Wuxian asked, now curious as to what elements were included in the final array.

"They will remain in their past bodies." Baoshan Sanren answered with a smile. "I believe aside from A-Ying, no one more than these two deserves a second chance."

"Ah! This means they can find A-Qing!" Ouyang Zizhen excitedly shouted. Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji chuckled at the young disciples' bright smiles.

"Little me, come here!" Wei Wuxian called Wei Ying to his side. "This is The Bright Moon and Gentle Breeze, Xiao Xingchen, and his cultivation partner, The Distant Snow and Cold Frost, Song Lan. Song Zichen. Xing-shishu is mother's shidi."

"Yunmeng Jiang's Wei Ying, Wei Wuxian greets Xing-shishu and Lan-shishu!" Wei Ying greets with a large smile on his face.

The Jiangs shared pensive glances as they watched the exchange. Their hearts unsettled as they realized the gravity of what is going to happen once they leave this hall. *'Another person with familial claims to A-Xian.'*

"Let's return to our seats and continue the viewing. We still have quite a ways to go with the memories." Zewu-jun smiled as everyone returned to their seats with Xiao Xingchen and Song Lan moving closer to the front to sit.

Zewu-jun and Lan-xiansheng moved to sit next to Jiang Cheng as the upcoming events will be painful for both him and A-Xian.

Boats carrying the Jiang disciples lazily drifted down the river. Passing the oar to 6th Disciple, Wei Wuxian flopped back down with a pout. He let out a whine to cover his flinch when his robe rubbed against his back causing it to sting. "So unfair. Everyone wasn't dressed either. I was the only one who got punished!"

Jiang Wanyin, "Because it hurts our eyes the most looking at your nakedness!" Laughter breaks out as fellow disciples throw compliments about Wei Wuxian's many qualities that could be the cause of his punishment.

"Why am I not surprised that seeing Wei Wuxian being punished is so second nature to the Jiang disciples?" Nie Mingjue commented.

"That's why he's so laid-back about the punishments he got in the Cloud Recesses." Nie Huaisang added.

Lan Qiren nodded in agreement, also not liking easy acceptance displayed. "Compared to home, our punishment was child's play."

Wei Wuxian gave him a look before suddenly diving into the water. Within seconds, Jiang Cheng was the only one left in the boat as all the shidis followed Wei Wuxian's lead into the water. "What the hell are you doing?!" demanded Jiang Wanyin.

The boat flipped over, belly up, in the water when Wei Wuxian struck it hard from the opposite side. One by one the disciples popped up from the water as Wei Wuxian climbed on top of the boat to sit cross-legged.

"Does the array return the equal amount of pain to the person who causes it?" Lan Xichen cautiously asked.

They've all noticed how much pain Yu Ziyuan was in when she received the rebounding strike. If it's of equal strength, Wei Wuxian should have collapsed on the ground as well. *Zidian* is a first class spiritual tool. It's designed to inflict trauma and pain.

"The same amount of pain and damage." Hua Cheng replied with a sneer towards Yu Ziyuan.

"Pathetic." He Xuan eyed Yu Ziyuan as she leaned painfully into her husband's side. "The boy took a direct hit to his back and was still able to continue on as usual. You can't even sit up properly? You call yourself the master of your tool?"

Mu Qing, "What does that say about A-Ying's pain tolerance?"

"What does it say about how he gained that pain tolerance?" Feng Xin's eyes flashed with anger.

Pei Xiu, "He has been conditioned to not feel pain."

Wen Qing's concerned gaze landed on Wei Ying. "Years of repeated exposure to pain will do that to a person."

After a few moments when Jiang Wanyin still hadn't resurfaced. Nothing except for a string of bubbles. Wei Wuxian wiped his face in confusion, "Why is he taking so long?"

Sixth shidi swam over and exclaimed, "Did he drown!?"

Jiang Cheng snorted in disgust. "No self-respecting Yunmeng resident would drown so easily!"

Wei Wuxian, "Impossible! Did you forget who you're talking about?"

A loud shout came from behind him and suddenly he was thrown in the water as the boat once again was flipped over by none other than a laughing Jiang Wanyin.

The boats picked up speed as they're directed towards a specific patch of Lotus blooms and seed pods. One by one the boys broke off a pod at the stem to peel seeds from the pods.

Jiang Wanyin looked over to watch his shixiong. Lately, he had been able to catch Wei Wuxian in moments where he thought no one was watching. When his smile cracked. Moments he covers up the moment he feels someone watching him.

Wei Ying, "You noticed?"

Jiang Cheng huffed, "It's easy when you know what to look for."

Wei Wuxian broke off a few stems and peeled one open to toss the round seeds into his mouth. "If I treat you to lotus pods, what will you treat me to?" He hummed

absentmindedly to himself.

***'Lan Wangji again…'* Jiang Wanyin sighed to himself before shouting at his shixiong. "Who are you treating now?"**

Wei Wuxian laughed as he refocused, "Haha, Definitely not you!"

The boys continued to bicker and fight as they drifted in the water. As Wei Wuxian readied himself to launch another lotus pod at Jiang Wanyin's face, he suddenly hushed everyone and made them duck down. "We're dead! The old man's here today!"

Wei Wuxian turned to Jiang Wanyin, "That reminds me! Who takes care of that farm now?"

"His grandson maintains it now. The old man was there when the Wens came." Jiang Wanyin replied with a sigh.

"Oh."

The familiar scene of the Discussion Conference in Qishan began to play on the cloth. Disciples from the different sects wandered around as they conversed with their friends and fellow disciples. Jiang Wanyin stood amongst his shidis as he looked around for Wei Wuxian.

Lan Xichen, "It seems we've caught up to our timeline now."

Further from the field, Wei Wuxian walked up an incline trying to find his way to the field. "What kind of place is this? Why is this place so hard to navigate? If I could just find someone to point me in the right direction!"

The sound of a bowstring being struck drew his attention to the left. Walking further towards the sound, Wei Wuxian came upon a Wen disciple practicing archery. *'Firm and steady hand. Posture standard but still beautiful. Who is this excellent archer?'*

Wen Qing turned to her brother, "This was when you met Wei Wuxian?"

Wen Ning smiled and nodded. "Mn!"

The boy took aim and released the arrow. The arrow flew smoothly towards the target and hit dead center alongside the others. The boy had another arrow notched even before the arrow found its mark.

Wei Wuxian, "Bravo! Good Shot!"

"Very impressive, Wei-gongzi." Jiang Fengmian complimented as the rest nodded in agreement and added their own compliments.

"Th- thank y-you!" Wen Ning stood from his seat and bowed to the sect leaders.

Yu Ziyuan scoffed at his side. "You would spare a compliment for a stranger but not for your own son!"

Jiang Fengmian shook his head, "San Niang. We can discuss this when we get back."

Yu Ziyuan laughs, "When we get back? Do you really think after all this, we'd really have time to "talk"?"

Jiang Fengmian, "San Niang-"

With a startled yelp, the boy released the arrow. The arrow flew across the cloth as a black and red robed chest came into view at the end of the arrow's path.

Everyone's stomach dropped as the arrow flew. They knew he survived but it was still heart-stopping.

The chest turned to the side as a hand shot out to stop the arrow in its path. Wei Wuxian's smiling face came into view with the arrow in his hand. "That was close! Don't worry! Which one of the Wen Sect's young masters are you? You're such a good archer! I've never seen such good archery from your sect before…"

"I'm sorry!" shouted the boy before he ran behind a cluster of boulders.

Laughter breaks out at the boy's reaction and Wei Wuxian's shocked face.

Jin Ling laughed, "You barely met the guy for a few seconds and you already scared him away?"

Lan Jingyi huffed between laughs, "That's a great ability, Wei-qianbei!"

"I keep telling you that your face will give people nightmares!" Jiang Cheng fell over Nie Huaisang as they both laughed harder.

"Am I that good-looking? So charming that I scared him away?" Wei Wuxian stood shocked for a moment before grabbing his own chin. "Aish, forget it. This place is a maze. Where is the archery field anyways?"

Both the older and younger Jiang Wanyins and Nie Huaisangs pretended to vomit at Wei Wuxian's words. That earned them pouts from Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying.

"Well…" A soft voice rang from behind a large boulder. An arm reluctantly shot out from behind it and pointed to the right "It's over there."

Wei Wuxian followed the direction the hand was pointing to with his eyes before smiling and bowing in greeting. "Thanks! This one is Wei Ying, Wei Wuxian of Yunmeng Jiang. May I have your name, gongzi?"

The boy shyly stepped out from behind the boulder before returning the smile and bowed. "I... I'm Wen Ning, Wen Qionglin of Qishan Wen."

"And like that he made a new friend." Stated Lan-xiansheng, shaking his head at how easily his nephew-in-law made friends."

"Sometimes all it takes is a simple greeting." Zewu-jun smiled.

Back on the Archery Field, Wei Wuxian's eyes caught on an array drawn on a post near the entrance. He was about to take a closer look but was pulled away by a yell. Jiang Wanyin finally laid eyes on his errant shixiong. “Wei Wuxian! Where did you run off to?”

Wei Wuxian propped his right arm on Jiang Wanyin’s shoulder, “This place is like a maze and I got lost finding my way here. Luckily someone helped me out! So much pomp and circumstance! Aiya… so much red. Why are we forced to wear the Wen guest robes for a competition anyway? What’s going to happen today?”

Before Jiang Wanyin could answer, Wei Wuxian is distracted by the sound of a bowstring being plucked. Looking back over his shoulder, Wei Wuxian spots Lan Wangji, also dressed in red, testing out his bow.

‘He looks good in red too. Is there a color he wouldn’t look good in?’ **Wei Wuxian sighed internally before fixing a smile on his face. “Wangji-xiong, when did you get here?”**

"You'll both be wearing red soon enough, Wei-xiong!" Nie Huaisang nudged his friend with a wink.

"Yah! That wasn't what I meant!" A red-faced Wei Ying shot back.

Lan Wangji spared him only a glance before turning and walking away, only to be blocked by Wei Wuxian. “We were classmates at least once, why act so cold?”

Taking a calming breath, Lan Wangji spoke, “Excuse me.”

Wei Wuxian, “I missed your birthday last year so I especially got you a gift!”

Lan Wangji, “It's not necessary.”

Wei Wuxian pouted to his husband, "So cold Lan Er-gege. Not even giving any face to your zhangfu!"

"Mn." Lan Wangji looked into Wei Wuxian’s eyes. "Will give face to my qizi."

"LAN ZHAN!!! YOU!!!" Wei Wuxian gasped wide-eyed at his husband. *'That smug look on his face!'*

Jaws dropped as they stared at Lan Wangji as if he's sprouted an extra head. Did the Second Jade just call Wei Wuxian his wife?!?!?

“Come on, don’t give me the cold shoulder! I put a lot of effort into it.” Wei Wuxian held up a book so that the title showed, Erotic Instructions and Tips for Love for Begininers. “That time I really didn't know you had never read something like it. So this time, this is an entry-level one!”

“Ridiculous.” Lan Wangji’s eyebrow twitched as he reigned in his expression and walked away.

“Wangji-xiong! Your forehead ribbon is crooked!” Wei Wuxian shouted after him.

Pausing his steps, Lan Wangji shot a hand up to fix his forehead ribbon only to find it straight. Flicking his sleeve, Lan Wangji left with a scoff that made Wei Wuxian laugh.

Nie Huaisang, "Wei-xiong, You… you really don't fear death do you?"

"Why?" Wei Ying asked. "It’s not like he would actually kill me."

"It's your funeral." Mumbled Jiang Cheng.

The archery field is filled with disciples from each sect lined up under their Sect’s flag. The banging of drums signaled the beginning of the Discussion Conference and a voice announced the entrance of the Sect Leaders.

“Sect Leaders of Lanling Jin Clan, Yunmeng Jiang Clan, Qinghe Nie Clan, and Lan-xiansheng, Lan Qiren, have arrived!”

Making their way up to the view platforms for the heads of the Sects, the Sect Leaders take note of their seating arrangements, the raised platform to the left, and the raised dais towering over the middle. As each sect’s flag is flown over where their sect leaders are seated, it becomes painfully obvious as to who would be sitting at the raised dais above the rest of the sect leaders.

Knowing what they know now, the Sect Leaders looked back on this day with new eyes. The signs were all there. The smaller sects were seated on lower platforms so they did not fully see how the Greater Sects were arranged.

Angered by the insult, Nie Mingjue turned around to leave the platform when he was stopped by Lan Qiren. “Nie-zongzhu, easy.”

“Our four Clans and Wen Clan have always sat together as hosts and guests. Now Wen Ruohan thinks he is above us and our leader!”

Lan-xiansheng, “He announced he mastered a hidden powerful skill and overtook three established clans in the North. He no longer has to pretend to be friendly with us now that he has become more powerful.”

"Hidden power." Wei Wuxian scoffed. "Tell me, Qing-jie, has Wen-zongzhu started to threaten you with A-Ning's safety to ensure you help him counter the effects of resentful energy yet?"

Wen Qing stared at Wei Wuxian in surprise. "He...Yes. I have been helping him since last year."

The Head Shaker, "Wen-yishi, your skills would be better appreciated in Qinghe. Nie-zongzhu has a promise to keep even though he seems to have forgotten he made it in the first

place."

By his tone, Nie Mingjue took a longer look at his younger brother who was forced to grow up too soon. While he looked older, his brother had an air of grief that surrounded him. But not only that, there was anger. An anger in his eyes that accompanied sharp words when he spoke.

Nie Mingjue, "Great. I'm done with all this hypocrisy and falsities anyways."

"Nie-zongzhu, please. I know you wanted to avenge your father. But the Wens' influence has grown immense. They will continue to be ruthless if not more so. For your sect's sake, bear it for now."

"Exactly. There is no need to be angry, Nie-zongzhu." Jin Guanshang stepped up onto the platform before taking his seat. "Sit down and have a drink."

"And look where that got us." Jiang Wanyin sneered at Jin Guangshan. The decades-long anger at the disease infested pile of shit dressed in gold before him spilling to the top. "Tell me, Jin Guangshan. How far stuck up his ass are you right now? Do you think that makes you immune to what's to come? I have news for you. Wen Ruohan still came for Lanling Jin's wealth and properties."

Jin Guangshan took offense to being talked to in such a way. But wisely chose to remain quiet lest he causes them to silence him again.

Jiang Fengmian, "Where I sit is of no importance. I'm more curious to see who's more superior than us to be seated so grandly over there."

The Sect Leaders took their seats and poured themselves a cup of tea. As they made small talk, Jin Guangshan surveyed his fellow Sect Leaders and the raised platform in front of him. Obviously Wen Rouhan held whomever that was going to sit across from him in higher esteem than others.

***'It will do Lanling Jin good to garner their favor.'* Jin Guangshan thought to himself as he took a sip of his tea. Seconds later, he's spitting out his tea at the announcement of the new arrival.**

"His Lordship Wen Chao has arrived!"

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin's faces darkened as the source of their tragedies stepped into view. The temperature in the hall suddenly dropped and a chill spread through the cultivators.

Wen Chao, with an arrogant sneer on his face, made his way up the platform and promptly sat in the seat across from the sect leaders. As if just remembering that he's supposed to show some sort of respect to the sect leaders, Wen Chao shallowly bowed from his seat with his head turned away from them.

Smirking, Nie Mingjue looked over to Jiang Fengmian, “Jiang-zongzhu, are you satisfied with your answer?”

Slamming his teacup down on the table, Lan-xiansheng bit out, “Such arrogance precedes coming chaos.”

"Disrespectful!"

"What do you expect from the Wens?"

"They think they're superior to us!"

"Need I remind you that there are Wens here who do not deserve to be clumped in with the likes of Wen Chao?" Wei Wuxian's cold voice reminded the cultivators.

The change from his usual cheerful tone warned them that any disrespect would not be tolerated. Su She's state was a stark reminder of what happens when you disrespect someone Wei Wuxian cared for.

“His Lordship, Wen Ruohan!”

Wen Rouhan entered the raised dais and took his seat. The viewers are shown the view of the platform and the archery field from Wen Rouhan’s right side. Seeing his son seated arrogantly across from the fellow sect leaders as they mask their anger and offense, Wen Rouhan let out a satisfied smirk before calling for the competition to begin.

"Is war truly unavoidable?" Lan Xichen sighed.

"Even if we wanted to, there's no stopping Wen Ruohan." Wen Qionglin spoke up. "My uncle is too obsessed with power and the resentful energy only adds fuel to it."

"His plans are already in action." Wen Qing added. "Even those named Wen are not safe from him. Our lives are forfeit the minute we open our mouths."

Back on the archery field, targets are placed in a variety of patterns and challenges as each disciple moves about to different targets. Jiang Wanyin stands behind his shixiong with his arms crossed and a scowl on his face as he watches Wei Wuxian make a fool out of himself to get Lan Wangji’s attention.

His attention is drawn away by another cultivator with a forehead ribbon. Dressed in red, Lan Xichen stepped up with perfect posture to take aim before releasing arrow after arrow until his quiver was empty.

Jiang Wanyin caught himself staring with his mouth hanging open and blushed before turning away. Missing the smile Lan Xichen sent his way upon noticing the younger boy watching him.

"You know, A-Cheng. When I said I thought you were never coming back because you found someone in Gusu, I didn't know it would come true." Wei Ying laughed as his shidi's face

burned red.

Lan Jingyi, "Oh! Is this the start of Zewu-jun and Sandu Shengshou's love story?"

Ouyang Zizhen, "It started in the Cloud Recesses too! Looks like the Cloud Recesses is the place to go if you want to meet your Forever. It's so romantic!"

Jin Ling, "Will you two cut it out? I'm going to have nightmares!"

Wei Wuxian pulled out a food basket that one of his shidis was holding for him and showed Lan Wangji its bright red contents, “I also brought you a specialty of Yunmeng, Spicy Mantis Shrimps!”

Lan Wangji does not even spare a look into the basket and only focuses on watching the Lan disciples shoot.

"Is that thing even edible?!?!?!"

"I can smell my taste buds dying."

"It's so red! Did they drown the shrimp in chilies?!?"

"Wei Wuxian! No one likes that level of heat but you!" Jiang Cheng shouted.

Jin Ling, "How do you still have taste buds?!?!"

Putting the basket down, Wei Wuxian pulls a scroll from his sleeve. “I know how much you love calligraphy! I wrote this especially for you!” Unrolling the scroll, Wei Wuxian held it up for Lan Wangji to read what it said: *Lan Wangji is so handsome!*

Lan Wangji turned his back to Wei Wuxian as he proceeded to step up to shoot. His red ears go unnoticed by Wei Wuxian.

“Lan Zhan! Look at me! Which one did you like?” Wei Wuxian pressed on, “If you didn’t like any of them, I can get you something else!”

Finally having had enough of Wei Wuxian bothering him, Lan Wangji notched an arrow and aimed it towards Wei Wuxian, causing the latter’s eyes to widen with shock and duck. “Help! Lan Zhan is trying to kill me!”

Lan Jingyi, "Whoa! Did Hanguang-jun actually aim an arrow at Wei-qianbei!?!?!"

Lan Sizhui, "Well, remember the text books said Hanguang-jun and the Yiling Laozu constantly fought and that Hanguang-jun even hated him."

Jin Ling, "Pft, Yeah… hated him so much he married him."

Lan Wangji let loose his arrow and it skimmed past Wei Wuxian and hit the target behind him.

“Lan Er-gongzi hit the bullseye!”

Lan Wangji lowered his bow but he missed the mischievous glint in Wei Wuxian’s eye as seconds later an arrow whizzed past him and split his arrow in two.

“Wei-gongzi hit the bullseye!”

Jiang Cheng pinched the bridge of his nose. "Once… just once, I would like to be able to go to a discussion conference where you don’t bother Lan Wangji!"

"Be careful what you wish for." Jiang Wanyin warned.

“Wei Ying.” Lan Wangji called out through gritted teeth.

“What?” Wei Wuxian asked in an innocent tone. “The target isn’t just yours alone. Why can't I shoot at it too?”

“Whatever.” Lan Wangji notched another arrow and split Wei Wuxian’s arrow in two.

“Lan Er-gonzi hit the-” before the announcer could finish, Wei Wuxian released another arrow and split Lan Wangji’s arrow again.

“Wei-gongzi hit the-” Lan Wangji retaliated.

“Lan Er-gongzi-”

“Wei-gongzi-”

“Lan-”

“Wei-”

“Lan-”

“Wei-”

“Lan-”

“Wei-”

“Lan-”

“Wei-”

“Hit-”

“Hit-”

“Hit-”

The cultivators watched with their mouths hanging open as shot after shot, the previous arrow would be split by the following arrow.

The younger boy's eyes were flickering on the cloth as they watched their Seniors' skills be put on display.

"Well… that explains his skill with the bow even as a 4 year old ghost child." Feng Xin laughed. "I still have your bow in my palace, A-Ying. I will drop it off to you one day."

"Thank you Feng-shushu!" Wei Wuxian smiled in response.

Finally both quivers were emptied and the announcer can finally take a break to catch his breath. “They… they both hit the bullseye!”

Wei Wuxian stood before the targets to admire their hard work. “Your arrows and mine have mixed so well! They look like well-arranged bouquets!”

"Come on! How can you say that's not romantic!?!?!" Shouted Ouyang Zizhen.

“You were being contrary on purpose!” Lan Wangji glared at him.

Wei Wuxian simply shrugged. “You didn't accept any of my gifts. I had to do something.”

“You-!” Lan Wangji was beginning to lose his temper when a bouquet of arrowhead feathers was shoved into his arms.

“Here! Your birthday gift!” Declared a smiling Wei Wuxian. “Lan Zhan, do you like it?”

Temporarily entranced by the smile, Lan Wangji tightened his grip on the so-called “bouquet” before turning away with red ears. “Boring”.”

"See? Romantic!" Ouyang Zizhen said once again with a pleased look on his face.

Jin Ling rolled his eyes, "We heard you the first time!"

"This is why you're still unmarried!" Lan Jingyi tsked.

"You're not married either!" Jin Ling retorted.

Lan Sizhui, "Guys! Is this really the time?"

Nie Huaisang turned to Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji, "Your wedding must have been amazing! You have to tell us about it!"

The past cultivators and Immortals leaned forward in their seats with smiles on their faces as they waited for details on the men's wedding. The smiles slowly dropping as more time passed and the looks on the future cultivators' faces became awkward. Lan Zhan's heart dropped. Something was wrong. They said they were married...

"A-Ying?" Xie Lian prompted.

"Ah, you see..." Wei Wuxian grimaced as he scratched the back of his head. "Lanzhanandieloped."

"Speak like a human, idiot!" Jiang Cheng shouted.

"Lan Zhan and I eloped." Wei Wuxian repeated as he avoided eye contact with his adoptive parents. The hall remained silent for a moment before hell broke loose in the form of furious Heavenly Gods and Ghost Kings.

"LAN WANGJI! WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS!?!?!" demanded Hua Cheng.

Lan Wangji stood before Xie Lian and Hua Cheng as he bowed deeply. "Wangji failed to provide Wei Ying with the wedding he deserves."

"Lan Zhan! I told you we didn't need one!" Wei Wuxian interjected.

"You couldn't even give him a proper wedding?" Mu Qing and Feng Xin asked together before both crossing their arms over their chests.

"The cultivation world was still not accepting of A-Xian even though his name was cleared." Lan-xiansheng explained. "I am ashamed to say that the Gusu Lan Elders, myself included, refused to allow Wangji and A-Xian to marry."

"I, unfortunately, had just secluded myself and refused visitors so I was not informed until it was too late. Gusu Lan's Elders did not believe Wangji would leave the sect for Wei Wuxian. They underestimated the 13 year grief Wangji endured. Wangji left the sect to travel with A-Xian and when they finally returned, they had already eloped."

"The son of a servant dares to dream of wearing red and taking bows. To a Young Master of a noble sect, nonetheless!" Yu Ziyuan sneered. "How laughable!"

"San Niang!"

"A-Niang!"

"A-Niang!"

"YU ZIYUAN!" The voices of the Immortals shook the hall.

"Yu-furen, aren’t you tired?" A voice came from the door in the back. All eyes turned towards the back as a red-robed figure walked through the door. The older time travelers shot up from their seats as a familiar face walked towards them.

"Constantly comparing your family to imaginary standards only to find them lacking? Why can't you be content with your privilege and status? Why take it out on Wei Wuxian if you are unhappy?" The figure continued. "Even if you are not tired, your family must be."

Confusion is evident in the faces of the past cultivators as their eyes flicker from Wei Wuxian's tearful eyes and Wen Qionglin's wide eyes. Wen Qing furrowed her eyebrows at their reactions to the newcomer.

With a small smile, the figure bowed in greeting to Xie Lian and Hua Cheng before turning to face the cultivators. "A-Ning. A-Xian."

"Jie…" whispered Wen Qionglin.

Wei Wuxian's knees buckled and he fell back into his husband's chest as arms wrapped around his waist to steady him. "Qing-jie…"

Chapter End Notes

Yea... I went there!

Only a few more chapters until the moment everyone is waiting for!!!!

The Doctor Comes Knocking

Chapter Summary

The rise of Wen-Shenyi.

A-Yuan's origins.

The Archery Competition continues.

Chapter Notes

This chapter got ridiculously long and I wanted to get one chapter updated at least by today so I broke the chapter into 2. Second part will be up soon!

For reference:
Past Wen Qing: Wen Qing/Wen-yishi
Future Wen Qing: Wen-Shenyi

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wen Qing watched as her older self made her way towards Wei Wuxian and Wen Qionglin. Their reactions puzzled her until she remembered what they were shown previously. She had been turned to ash by the Jins. The two men had not seen that version of her for over two decades.

Recalling that Wen Qing had fallen victim to the Jin's greed mere years from now, the past cultivators were confused as to how this version of her was here before them. There were no signs to indicate that she was a ghost or even a fierce corpse like her brother. It was obvious that she knew the Heavenly Gods and Ghost Kings. But, what exactly was she?

They observed the stark difference between the Wen Qing of their time and her older self. Although her face was fierce, her eyes softened when they landed on Wen Qionglin and Wei Wuxian. While the younger Wen Qing carried herself with maturity, her older self exuded confidence while her eyes carried deep sorrow.

They say the eyes are the windows to one's soul. If they looked into every one of the time travelers' eyes, would they find similar sorrows? Loss? Grief? Death? Destruction? Betrayal? Forgiveness? Repentance?

The older Wen Qing stopped before Wen Qionglin and reached a hand out to cup his cheek. If the fierce corpse could produce tears, they would be falling from Wen Qionglin's eyes. Instead his eyes drank up the sight of his sister in her resplendent glory.

Gone were the gaunt cheeks and dry cracked lips from their days in the Burial Mounds. Her brown eyes looked back at him with unshed tears before firm hands pulled him into a hug. He gently wrapped his arms around his sister, being careful not to crush her with his strength. "Jie!"

"A-Ning!" Wen Qing breathed out. "Jiejie is sorry I was not able to stay by your side longer."

"You're here now!" Wen Qionglin replied eagerly. "You're here now."

Wen Qing released her brother as her eyes locked on Wei Wuxian. Walking over to stand before the man she has long accepted as a younger brother, Wen Qing reached out a hand to cup his cheek. Wei Wuxian's eyes met hers as he leaned his cheek into her palm with a sad smile.

In a flash, Wei Wuxian's ear is firmly pinched between her fingers as she pulls his head down to reprimand him as a mother would an errant child. "WEI WUXIAN!!"

"Ouch! Ouch! Qing-jie! That hurts!"

Future and past cultivators flinch at the all too familiar torture technique employed by the matriarchs of their families. Looks of sympathy are sent Wei Wuxian's way but no one moves to intervene. One knows better than to get in between a pissed off lady and the target of her fury.

"THE NEXT TIME YOU DECIDE TO BUILD A 'GARDEN' IN THE GHOST CITY OR THE HEAVENLY COURTS, STAY THE HELL AWAY FROM THE MEDICINAL HERBS FIELDS! DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG IT TOOK ME TO CLEAR YOUR STUPID DEVIL'S VINE?!?!?! 6 YEARS!" Wen Qing continued to rage.

"AND DON'T GET ME STARTED ON THOSE STUPID MONSTROSITIES YOU DREW WITH THE WUSE BI! WHAT 10 YEAR OLD KID DRAWS CREATURES THAT INSANELY POWERFUL?!?!?! WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?!?!? DO I NEED TO STAB YOU WITH MY NEEDLES FOR YOU TO LISTEN?!?!" Wen Qing finished as she panted to catch her breath.

Wei Wuxian, "At least it wasn't radishes!"

Silence overtook the hall as cultivators watched with mouths hanging open. Wen Ning exchanged shocked looks with his sister as they turned back to the scene in front of them. 'Jie doesn't like touching others unless she's treating them. Wei-gongzi really did become closer to Jie and I in the future.'

Several silent moments passed as the older Wen Qing continued to glare at Wei Wuxian. Slowly, a soft chuckle rose from Wei Wuxian's throat. Before long, more chuckles followed.

Lan Jingyi, "Uhm… Wei-qianbei? Are you ok?"

Jiang Wanyin, "He's finally lost what's left of his mind."

The chuckle grew to full on laughter when Wen Qing herself let out a chuckle. A stiff smile cracks on Wen Qionglin's face as he slightly tilts his head to the side. Before anyone could make sense of the situation, Wen Qing had released Wei Wuxian's ear and pulled him into a hug. "I'm sorry, A-Xian. If I had known our surrender would have made no difference, I would not have willingly gone to Jinlintai. Things would have been different."

Wei Wuxian shook his head and pulled back in her arms. "Qing-jie! You did what you thought was best for the rest of us. You couldn't have known he would go back on his words."

Wen Qing, "But I saw all those men he sent to try and recruit you. I saw all the things they tried to do to get to you. I should have questioned their offer. Gone to Hanguang-jun or even Jiang Wanyin. We shouldn't have just left you there immobilized."

Wei Wuxian hushed her cries as he rubbed her back. "It's in the past now. We're here together with our family. But, Qing-jie… how?"

Wen Qing released a sigh. "When I came to after the events at Jinlintai, I found I had been roaming aimlessly through Lanling for years. The Jins were so caught up in their 'victory' over the Yiling Laozu that they refused to take on any night hunts that were considered beneath them. That left their civilians to fend for themselves or to find rogue cultivators therefore I was able to freely move around for so long."

The leaders of the Great Sects frowned at this bit of information. Dealing with resentful creatures and beings were the jobs of cultivators. Each sect owned their own lands and territory therefore they were obligated to maintain safety for the civilians who reside there.

It's common for sects to differ the smaller nighthunts to less experienced disciples but they were never fully ignored or denied help. If this happened for years then were the other sects complacent as well? Or were they too scared to say anything like with the Wens?

"That was when I learned that the Jins still incited the other sects after our surrender to lead a siege on the Burial Mounds and massacred everyone. That Jiang Wanyin himself stabbed you before your fierce corpses tore you apart." Wen Qing narrowed her eyes at Jiang Wanyin as she spoke.

Wei Wuxian laughed nervously, "Ah… Qing-jie. Let's discuss that later. I'm sure we'll be shown what happened then sooner or later. This array is quite… thorough."

Glaring at Wei Wuxian, Wen Qing replied, "Fine. But don't expect me to change my mind about him." Wei Wuxian nodded as Jiang Wanyin looked anywhere but at the older Wen Qing.

"I spotted Jin Guangyao slipping into a questionable brothel. He had traces of resentful energy that seemed similar to those emitted from the amulet on him so I followed him. I saw him meet with Xue Yang and ordered him to 'clean up' a loose end for him."

Wei Wuxian's eyes looked to Meng Yao to watch his reaction. "He ordered Xue Yang to burn down a brothel in Yunping. He built a Guanyin temple in its place."

Something flickered in the man's eyes before it was quickly replaced with a blank expression. Eyes still on the man, Wei Wuxian continued. "Only one person survived that night. Only because she was nice to Madam Meng and her son. However, she was locked away still so that no one could link him to the crime."

Meng Yao's eyebrows furrowed as he thought back on his time at the brothel. The only person that was nice or even willing to help himself and his mother was Sisi. If he truly gave in to his fantasy of burning the brothel to the ground, something had pushed him to that point. It was a big leap from dreaming of doing something so evil to actually doing it. No matter how much he despised that place and the women inside it.

Unbeknownst to him, four pairs of eyes were observing him. Wei Wuxian and Zewu-jun observed the man to gauge if his murderous scheming and manipulations had already begun. Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen watched the man for any hint of the deceptive man his future self had become. Even after everything they've been told about Jin Guangyao, it was hard for them to reconcile this man before them with the one in the future.

Wen Qing, "I followed Jin Guangyao back to Jinlintai where he headed to a hidden part of the dungeons. It was there that I found A-Ning chained to the wall and unresponsive like his consciousness was once again gone. They had drawn a spirit containment array there as a fail safe and I was trapped there alongside A-Ning. Jin Guangyao often came with either Jin Guangshan, Xue Yang, or that one over there -" she points to Su She. "- to try different ways to control A-Ning but they failed. Jin Guangyao eventually gave the order to drill those nails into A-Ning's head."

"Nails?!?!"
"What kind of monsters think of these things?!?!"

Zewu-jun closed his eyes to absorb the pain that came with Wen Qing's words. He had held hope that Jin Guangyao did not actively partake in trying to recreate Wei Wuxian's mastery over resentful energy. They knew Jin Guangshan had ordered it to be done and Jin Guangyao would delegate the tasks to others like Xue Yang. Jin Guangyao died before a full investigation could be done so the full extent of his involvement and crimes were still unknown. Knowing he had willingly instigated Nie Mingjue's Qi deviation with his own hands was already a hard pill to swallow. Now they will know just how far he went to please his father.

"I only recognized Xian-ge as master. No matter what was done, they would never be able to fully control me against my will even with those nails." Wen Qionglin explained.

Wen Qing, "Then one day I heard Wei Wuxian's voice and A-Ning broke free from the chains. When he escaped, the containment array was destroyed and I was able to leave. Hua Chengzhu found me and brought me back to the Ghost City."

Xie Lian, "Wen-Shenyi worked her way to become the Ghost Doctor the past decade. It was only recently that she ascended as the new Goddess of Medicine."

'Goddess of Medicine? Me?' Wen Qing watched wide-eyed. Never in her wildest dreams would she have thought to ascend. Immortality was rare enough as it was.

Seeing her internal struggle, Shi Qingxuan spoke up. "Wen-yishi, the potential to ascend is determined when your soul is born. The determining factor is how you cultivate that potential. Your tireless efforts to save people and your thirst for medical knowledge is the reason for your ascension."

"What's more important…" Xie Lian pulled her attention to him. "Is that you did not allow yourself to fall into the pits of resentment that would have corrupted you. Though, I wouldn't have blamed you if you did."

"I knew you were meant for grander things! Now we have to make sure you're on your way to ascension again! Only this time, no one is dying!" Wei Wuxian smiled brightly at her as Wen Qionglin nodded at his side.

Wen-Shenyi bowed her head towards Xie Lian before walking over to Su She. Little by little, she healed the man's broken joints. "I do not like you. The things you have done in the past are despicable and underhanded. I am only healing because you have yet to commit the wrongs of your future self. But disrespect Wei Wuxian and his loved ones again, you will have me to contend with."

Memories of an angry Wen Qing chasing Wei Wuxian around the Burial Mounds settlement flashed in Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying's mind. A shiver wracked through their bodies. And people thought the Yiling Laozu was fearsome! They've never faced a pissed off Wen Qing!

"Speaking of family!" Wei Wuxian grabbed Lan Wangji and Lan Sizhui by the arms and pulled them in front of Wen-Shenyi. "You remember my husband, Lan Zhan, right?"

"Lan Wangji? The man you wouldn't stop talking about? The man whose virtues can't be touched by mere mortals? The one to bring smiles to your face whenever he visits the Burial Mounds? That Lan Wangji? As if you would let me forget." Wen-Shenyi asked with a small smile on her face.

"Just how did it take them almost 20 years to be together?" Asked Jiang Cheng.

"It's Wei Wuxian." Jiang Wanyin replied. And for some reason… it made sense to everyone.

Clearing his throat, Wei Wuxian continued with an embarrassed chuckle. "And this is our little radish, Lan Yuan. Lan Sizhui."

Lan Sizhui stepped forward to greet to his aunt. The woman who helped raise him in the Burial Mounds. "A-Yuan greets Qing-gugu."

"A-Yuan?" Wen-Shenyi's eyes shot towards Wei Wuxian before flicking to Wen Qionglin. Both nodded as tears began to fill her eyes. Her hand shot out to cup both of Lan Sizhui's cheeks while her eyes looked over his features to find any sign of the little boy she once knew.

"You look so much like your father. When I heard that everyone in the Burial Mounds were killed, I thought..." Wen-shenyi pulled Lan Sizhui into a tight hug. "Thank the Heavens you're safe!"

Wei Wuxian, "Lan Zhan found him and brought him back to The Cloud Recesses. Adopted him as his own son."

Wen-Shenyi bowed deeply in gratitude to Lan Wangji. "Our family owes you a great debt, Hanguang-jun."

"It was what should be done. " Lan Wangji replied. "A-Yuan is Wei Ying's son. Our son."

Curious to the origins of his grand-nephew, Lan-xiansheng asked, "Wen-Shenyi, if you do not mind my asking. Who are Lan Sizhui's birth parents?"

Wen-Shenyi faltered for a moment while locking eyes with her younger self. After a moment, she finally replied. "While everyone was at the Archery Competition, Wen Rouhan sent Wen Xu to Dafan to bring back my family as reassurance for my continued cooperation to help him stave off the effect of resentful energy. Wen Xu had an...obsession with my cousin Wen Yan and used this opportunity to force himself on her. A-Yuan was born during the war not long before Nie-zongzhu beheaded Wen Xu. Jin Zixun shot his mother with an arrow as she ran away after he raped her after the war. The rest, along with Wen Popo, A-Yuan, and 5 other children, were sent to the labor camp at Qiongqi Path."

Pain crossed Zewu-jun's features. "There were 5 other children?"

Wen-Shenyi, "Only A-Yuan survived by the time Wei Wuxian freed the remnants from the labor camps. If he hadn't come when he did, I'm not sure if A-Yuan would have made it."

"So much pain and suffering, all for the greed of two men." Xie Lian sighed. "Shall we return to the viewing? There's much more to learn and questions might be answered as we go along."

As everyone returned to their seats, Wen-Shenyi sat down next to Wen Qionglin and held his hand as she smiled towards Lan Sizhui. Her family is together again.

"Hundreds of evil spirits dwell in this stone forest. Whomever shoots the most evil spirits wins. Flares will indicate Sect color when targets are hit. Wrong shots or missed shots are indicated by black flares. Those result in disqualification and you must immediately leave the field. Open the array! The archery hunt officially...BEGINS!"

Each Sect lines up to enter the hunting grounds from their allocated entrance. Wei Wuxian watched on as the Wens shuffled around to fill their spots. "The Wen Sect's… terrible archery skills are on the same level as each other. It wouldn't matter who goes. Why even fight for a spot?"

"Another one! We're still short one! Hurry it up!" Wen Chao shouted from his seat.

In the bustle of Wen disciples rushing to fill spots for the archery competition, Wen Qionglin stood waiting to be noticed and hopefully picked. After the frantic shuffling settled down, one of the group leaders finally noticed him. “Wen Qionglin? You want to participate too?”

“This was the guy that everyone in the future is so scared of?”
“Maybe he was more scary once he got turned into a fierce corpse?”
“Well… he’s sitting right there in front of us. Does he look scary to you?”
“He looks… adorable actually.”

Wen Qionglin shifted uncomfortably in his seat while the past cultivators continued their discussion about him.

Ouyang Zizhen, “Well… at least they’re not trying to kill you anymore.”

Wen Qionglin nodded his head as another disciple laughed, “I’ve never seen you pick up a bow and you want to participate?! Don’t waste the spot.”

The group leader noticed Wen Qionglin wanted to protest so he interjected, “Alright, alright. If you go out there and lose your own face, it’s not my problem.”

Wei Wuxian laughed at the man’s statement. ‘Lose face? If anyone in the Qishan Wen Sect had the skill to bring any face to you, it’d be him!’

Nie Mingjue scoffs, “They should have let him participate instead of Wen Chao. Maybe then they would have at least ranked in the top 10.”

Lan Xichen nods, “With what we have seen, he has a good foundation to do well.”

Wen Qionglin lowered his eyes to the ground as he bowed his head. Embarrassed by the sudden attention. Before he could turn around to leave the field, a voice called out.

“Who said that he’s never picked up a bow?” Wei Wuxian asked. “He has. His archery is quite good!”

Wen Ning smiled as he watched this moment play out on the cloth. Even though he embarrassed himself and Wei Wuxian, it was still one of the best days of his life. The day he met someone who was genuinely kind to him.

Everyone looked at him somewhat surprised. They then turned to look at the boy. Wen Qionglin's face was rather pale to begin with. Because of how everyone’s eyes centered on him, it immediately became bright red.

Wen Chao's attention was pulled to the disciple who had spoken up. "You… You're that… Wei Wuxian? I hear that your archery is pretty good."

"Good enough for shooting pheasants." Wei Wuxian shrugged.

"Our evil spirit targets are nothing like your stupid pheasants. They won't stay still and wait to be shot." Wen Chao sneered. "Wen Ning, he said you can shoot. Let's see what

you've got."

Mu Qing, “Is he really that stupid?”

Shi Qingxuan, “Obviously he has never hunted pheasants in his life.”

Feng Xin, “Or there’s something wrong with the Qishan Wen pheasants.”

Wen-Shenyi, "Wen Chao only stood by as the Wen disciples did all the work."

Shaking from nerves, Wen Qionglin answered in a low voice, "… I… I only just started practicing recently…"

Wen Chao interrupted impatiently as he looked away to sip his wine, "There’s a target over there. Shoot an arrow for us to see. If you make it then go, if it’s not then leave."

Space was made around Wen Qionglin and the target. His hand shook as he tightly clenched the bow. Wei Wuxian placed a hand on his shoulder when he noticed the boy's lack of confidence, "Relax. Just do it like you did before."

Lan Sizhui, "Wei-qianbei has always been a great teacher."

"He's not the Head Disciple for nothing, you know!" Jiang Cheng responded with a hint of pride. Jiang Fengmian had a small smile on his lips as he nodded his head in agreement.

Lan-xiansheng, "He has the ability to connect with the students in a way that we’re not able to. And that's what makes his skills so invaluable."

Wen Qionglin shot him a grateful smile before he took a deep breath and drew his bow. Wei Wuxian shook his head and sighed internally. 'The way he's shaking… Looks like he's never shot in front of others. That's going to cause him trouble.'

The arrow flew a short distance and didn’t even reach anywhere near the target. Mocking laughter ripped through the Wens as Wen Chao spit out his wine as he laughed.

“How is that any good?!?!”
"If he thinks that's good, this competition is going to be easy!"
“I can do better with my eyes closed.”
"What a joke!"

"Great, you're so great!" Wen Chao wiped his mouth before sneering. "What are you still standing there for? Waiting for me to kick you out? Find someone else for that final spot!"

"I can’t believe this is one of the young masters of a Sect!"
"They've grown so powerful that they can't be bothered to be nice to their own fellow disciples."

Red-faced, Wen Qionglin turned to run away, self-conscious and embarrassed.

"Hey, don’t run! Qionglin-xiong!" Hearing his name being called, Wen Qionglin stopped and turned to see Wei Wuxian behind him.

"Why are you running?" Wei Wuxian asked.

Head hanging low, Wen Qionglin stammered,"… I’m sorry."

Confused, Wei Wuxian asked, "Why are you saying sorry to me?"

Wen Qionglin, "Y-You recom-m-mended me. B-But I made you... lose face."

Wei Wuxian, "Did I lose face? You haven’t shot in front of others, have you? Were you nervous?"

"Wen-gongzi, it's not easy to perform in front of others especially if it's the first time. You did exceptionally well." Jiang Fengmian complimented.

Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen nodded in agreement. "For someone who is essentially self-taught, your skills are quite impressive." Nie Mingjue added.

Lan Xichen, "In the future, if you would like more practice, The Cloud Recesses will always welcome you."

Blushing from the compliments and encouragement, Wen Ning stood from his seat and bowed to the Sect leaders in gratitude. "Wen Ning t-thanks you f-for your kind words and w-will continue t-to work on my s-skills."

At Wen Qionglin's nod, Wei Wuxian continued. "Have some confidence! To tell you the truth, you're a better shot than anyone in your sect. Out of all those I have seen, only three people are better with the bow than you."

Jiang Cheng caught the tail end of the conversation as he walked over, "What troubles are you causing this time? Three of what?"

Wei Wuxian smirked as his eye twinkled mischievously before pointing at Jiang Wanyin. "For example, this one. He’s not as good as you."

Jin Ling, "You're one of the best archery teachers now. I even trained with you for a while."

Jiang Wanyin looked at his nephew in shock, "You did? When was this?"

"Right before the last Discussion Conference in the Cloud Recesses. Wen Qionglin happened upon me in the back hills." Jin Ling scratched the back of his head. "My nerves were getting to me because it was right before the Elders' evaluation to become an Archery Master."

Jiang Wanyin furrowed his eyebrows, "I thought Wei Wuxian helped you with that."

Jin Ling, "They both did. Wen Qionglin stepped in when Da-jiu had to attend to his duties."

Jiang Wanyin's face scrunched up before he shoved Wei Wuxian from the back, "Yah! Do you want to die?!?"

Wei Wuxian forced his face to remain calm as pain shot through his back from the lashing he received last night for asking Shijie to help him cook the dish for Lan Wangji.

"There's nothing to be nervous about. Keep practicing in front of others and you'll gain confidence in no time! Next time, you'll leave all of them shocked and amazed!" Wei Wuxian encouraged the younger boy.

'He has potential. But without proper guidance, he's going to end up hiding his true self and never develop his talent.' Wei Wuxian thought to himself as he continued to encourage the younger boy with helpful corrections in his stance and where to focus for faster growth and improvement.

Wen Qionglin stood captivated as he listened attentively. His eyes trained on Wei Wuxian with awe and admiration as he nodded his head uncontrollably.

Lan Xichen, "Wei-gongzi-"

Wei Wuxian chuckled, "Xichen-ge, at this point shouldn't you be less formal with me? At least call Little Me and I, Wuxian."

Chuckling, Lan Xichen amended, "Wuxian, how many lessons are you in charge of in The CloudRecesses?"

"Aside from Talismans, I'm also in charge of Archery and a few different sparring workshops along with nighthunts."

Lan Qiren, "Sparring workshop?"

Lan-xiansheng, "He trains the disciples to use dianxue as well as hand to hand combat while their Golden Cores are locked away."

Gasps can be heard around the hall at the mention of locking away someone's Golden Core.

"Why would anyone willingly lock away their Golden Cores?"
"I'd rather die than do that!"

"Then that is probably why you didn't make it out of the Sunshot Campaign alive." Jiang Wanyin retorted. "We all rely heavily on our Golden Cores and that is also our weakness."

The past cultivators look at Jiang Wanyin as his words sank in. His tone and conviction hinted at something that none of them wanted to acknowledge. His words sounded almost as if he's experienced it himself. But he was able to control Zidian earlier so it couldn't have been him who lost their core.

Several discerning eyes snapped to Wei Wuxian in trepidation. His behavior and the fact that he was avoiding questions regarding his sword or the lack of it, became red flags. But Wen-

yishi had checked him before and said everything was normal.

Watching the Wen boy idolizing his shixiong made something in his chest sour. Jiang Wanyin hurried to pull his shixiong away, "Where did you come up with all this nonsense? The competition's starting soon. Get your ass into the field right now!"

Wei Wuxian continued to speak to Wen Qionglin in a serious tone, "I'm going to head out now. Later, you can see how I shoot when I'm on the field and see what I meant."

Impatiently Jiang Wanyin dragged him away. "See how you shoot? You really think that you're a role model or something?!?"

Wei Wuxian pretended to think for a moment before replying, "Am I not?"

Jiang Wanyin, "Wei Wuxian! I haven't seen anyone as shameless as you!"

Nie Huaisang, "Wei-xiong! You're my inspiration! I will paint a new masterpiece in your name!"

Wei Ying, "Nie-xiong… I charge for my time! A master cannot give away his secrets for free!"

Nie Huaisang, "Ah! I will send my best collection your way! Oh! Wait! No, no, no! I have to amass a new collection to… assist… you-"

Hua Cheng glared at Nie Huaisang, "Nie Huaisang. I will lay fire to all your precious treasures if you complete that sentence."

Fear flashed in Nie Huaisang's eyes before he cowered behind his older brother. His eyes silently communicate with Wei Ying that he will still send the goods over.

On the rocky competition field, the Jiang disciples stand amongst rocks and stone pillars. Each looking in a different direction in search of targets.

"Where are the evil spirits?"

Feeling like they are wasting time, Jiang Wanyin spoke up. "Let's split up and meet at the exit."

Jiang Cheng covered his face as Wei Ying let out a snort. Their reactions sparked curiosity in the younger time travelers.

Wei Wuxian follows behind Jiang Wanyin as they flatten themselves against the rocks to squeeze into a tight space between the rocks. "Where on earth are you leading us?"

"Shut up and stop complaining! Just keep up." Jiang Wanyin shouted back at Wei Wuxian before turning back around to continue forward. His head slammed against a low hanging stalactite.

For a moment, the cultivators only flinched at the man's pain. Who hasn't felt the pain of running into something while not paying attention?

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin are on all fours crawling through a low tunnel as Jiang Wanyin led the way. "Hey! Why don't we just go back to where we started? Don't worry, I won't tell anybody where we were."

"Shut up!!" Jiang Wanyin turned his head back to yell at Wei Wuxian, not paying attention to the path before him. His head slams into a low ledge as he turns his head back towards the front again. Wei Wuxian's laughter rings through the cavern.

Laughter breaks out this time as the poor man rubbed his forehead.

Nie Mingjue, "Maybe you should stop looking at Wei Wuxian whenever you're in a tough spot. It would cause less… headaches."

Jiang Wanyin rubs his forehead as they make their way through several stone openings. The sky got darker as they walked.

"Hey, Jiang Cheng."

"What now?"

"Look!" Wei Wuxian pointed to the sky where three shadow puppets flew.

"Those are... the evil spirit targets!" Jiang Wanyin exclaimed in excitement, grabbing the attention of the puppets. Pulling an arrow from his quiver, Jiang Wanyin "injured" one puppet but before he could notch another arrow, another was inches from his face. There was no time to deflect so he braced for impact.

"A-Cheng!"

An arrow flew across the cloth and pierced through the puppet from behind.

"You're welcome!" Wei Wuxian shouted from a high ledge as he shot down the remaining puppets with ease.

"Whoa!"
"Impressive!"
"And so quickly too!"

Nie Mingjue, "Those puppets seemed faster and more vicious than previous years. Did you notice that, Xichen?"

Lan Xichen, "I did. Though I didn't think they would come that close so forcefully."

Wen-shenyi, "Wen Ruohan infused some resentful energy into each one to make them more vicious and harder to hunt. He was experimenting with resentful energies and forcing me to treat the damage caused to his body from it."

Wen Rouhan was messing with resentful energy? They've seen the power Wei Wuxian exuded, how much worse would Wen Ruohan become? He didn't have the morals or the willpower that Wei Wuxian does to stay on the straight and narrow. The sooner they took the Wen sect leader the safer it would be for everyone.

Jiang Cheng chanced a glance at his mother. He had missed his chance to score the first points in the competition and even had to be rescued. Although pale, Yu Ziyuan's face clearly showed her disappointment.

Back at the viewing platform, the Sect Leaders are engaged in small talk as they wait for the first points to be announced. An hour had already passed when a flare graced the skies to announce the first points scored.

A purple Nine-Petal Lotus.

"Amazing! Jiang-zongzhu, your disciple's archery skills are truly unmatched. I'm certain the winner must be your clan again this year." Jin Guangshan half-heartedly praised as he lifted his tea cup to salute the Jiang Sect Leader. They no longer had a betrothal agreement between their sects so Jin Guangshan felt no need to further pander to the other man like he used to.

Jiang Fengmian frowned at the scene. It seems he needs to reevaluate Yunmeng Jiang's allies when they returned. There is no room for false allies with war on the horizon.

Liu Rushi glared at her husband. "I guess you're really incapable of simple basic human decency. Do you really see yourself as better than everyone? You're pathetic."

Jiang Fengmian bowed his head towards Jin Guangshan in thanks. "I'm flattered but we can't know the results until the end."

As if the flare was a catalyst for the rest, flares began to light up the night sky one after the other.

Two clue Clouds.
One yellow Sparks Amidst Snow.
One grey Head of the Beast.

Lan Jingyi, "Now we're talking!"

Jin Ling, "We haven't had an Archery Competition in years. Maybe we should pick it back up after we return?"

The future Sect Leaders nodded their heads in agreement. It has been quite a while. It will give the disciples a chance to meet up and unwind.

Wen Chao glared at the flares as if they offended him personally. Across from him, the Sect Leaders' congratulating each other only made him more angry. Suddenly, another flare lit up the sky.

One red Sun.

Wen Chao smirked arrogantly as he lifted his wine up to his lips. His gloating was short-lived however when more flares lit up the sky.

Five black Suns.

The hall erupted in laughter at Wen Chao's expression.

"They had one lucky shot and they got cocky too early."

"Should have let Wen Qionglin on the field!"

Jin Guangshan, who had stood up to salute his fellow sect leaders, lowered his tea cup before commenting. "Goodness. 5 Wen disciples eliminated already?"

Seeing the anger on Wen Rouhan's face, Jin Guangshan quickly shut up and returned to his seat to fan himself with a nervous chuckle.

Angered by the turn of events, Wen Chao stood before his father. "Fuqin, please allow me to go down there and compete for Qishan Wen."

Chapter End Notes

Devil's vine or devil's ivy: A highly invasive plant. It is almost impossible to kill. It stays green even when kept away from sunlight. Can be found in tropical and sub-tropical forests worldwide, including northern South Africa, Australia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Pacific Islands and the West Indies. It has been known cause severe ecological damage.

Dianxue (Chin Na) - Characters use these techniques to kill, paralyze, immobilize or control opponents by attacking their acupressure points with the bare hand or weapons. Also used in healing to immobilize patients for procedures and aid in healing.

Shenyi - basically God Doctor

Writing On The Wall

Chapter Summary

Completion of the Archery Competition.

Cultivation World, are you listening now?

Fire rains down on The Cloud Recesses.

Chapter Notes

Part 2 as promised! Accidentally deleted this chapter so I had to upload again =(

I can't believe we've reached over 113K hits and almost 4K kudos!

I have a one shot in the works to celebrate! It is a continuation of "Chenqing and Wangji Takes Matters Into Their Own Hands" for those who have been waiting patiently for one!

Once again, Thank you for sticking it out with me! Your comments bring me much needed motivation and inspiration 😄

"He really thought he could do better than everyone else?"

"They had to try something to regain some face!"

A loud cry interrupted the speakers as they all turned towards Hua Cheng. Nonchalantly, he pulled a Daruma doll from inside his robe and threw it on the ground. The doll rolled several times before it came to a stop at Wei Wuxian's foot. As if something had possessed it, the doll began to shake vigorously and started to wail.

"This…" Wei Wuxian bent to pick it up and the wails grew louder. "A-Die, is... this Wen Chao?"

"He's been in one of the cells for a while now. I've only just realized the part he played in your sufferings otherwise he and I would have spent more time together." Hua Cheng answered. "I thought it would be interesting to have him here so he can reflect on his own stupidity."

The doll continued to shake harder until it fell from Wei Wuxian's hand. With a shrug, Wei Wuxian kicked the doll away and it landed near Hua Cheng's seat.

Back on the field, Wei Wuxian had become separated from Jiang Wanyin as he walked around the field. *'These targets are easier than Yunmeng's pheasants!'*

Spotting two puppets, Wei Wuxian pulled an arrow from its quiver and shot. The arrow pierced the first puppet through the head and continued its trajectory to the second puppet but it dodged at the last minute.

Notching a second arrow, Wei Wuxian shot again at the puppet. The puppet dodged the fatal shot again but was not fast enough to dodge it completely as the arrow pinned it to the boulder on the ground. Wei Wuxian notched a third arrow to finish off the target only to suddenly jerk to the side in alarm. An arrow whizzed by where his head previously was and pierced the puppets head instead.

Xie Lian narrowed his eyes at the scene. "He intended for that arrow to hit A-Ying. They've only just met but he's already set out to kill."

Pei Ming, "If A-Ying's senses weren't so well honed, he would have succeeded."

Lan Zhan and Jiang Cheng frowned. They hadn't known Wen Chao was harassing Wei Wuxian until the flares alerted them. How many more near misses did Wei Wuxian have before they caught up to him?

Wei Wuxian turned to find Wen Chao lowering his bow behind him. A red sun flare lit up the sky seconds later behind him. "Wei Wuxian! As long as I am here, you and your people will never win!"

And like that, wherever Wei Wuxian went, Wen Chao and his men trailed beside him. Stealing targets before Wei Wuxian could even release another arrow. If a purple lotus flare is fired, a red sun flare quickly follows.

"So his strategy to win was to follow Wei Wuxian and steal his targets. How disgraceful." Nie Mingjue spoke. "I had wondered what the situation was when the flares were so close to each other."

Nie Huaisang laughed into his fan, "He did all this and still didn't place in the end?"

Touching down on a low ledge, Wen Chao grabs an arrow from his servant and takes aim at the puppet before him. He releases his arrow however it misses its target as another arrow beats it to take the kill shot.

Wen Chao, "What the…?"

Wei Wuxian smirked, "Thanks!"

A Purple Nine-Petal Lotus lights up the sky followed by a Black Sun flare.

Nie Mingjue let out a loud laugh. "Beating him at his own game! Great job, Wuxian!"

The Head Shaker smirked as he watched his older brother interact with a smiling Wei Ying. The more they watched, the more his brother had grown attached to the boy. This was what he had hoped for after meeting Wei Wuxian all those years ago. 'If Da-ge and Ying-ge had a close relationship back then, things would have turned out differently.'

No one commented on Nie Mingjue's sudden use of Wei Wuxian's courtesy name but they took note. The Nie Sect Leader felt comfortable enough to ease up on formalities and Wei Wuxian allowed it.

Jin Guangshan will need to deal with Qinghe Nie before he can move on to Gusu Lan. His eyes landed on Meng Yao. His future self was willing to do anything for his approval. Perhaps he can still make use of him.

If there is anything he knows about these bastards of his, they're dying for a drop of his attention. The Mo child that resurrected Wei Wuxian obviously has the aptitude for resentful cultivation. 'Perhaps I don't need Wei Wuxian. Just his notes.'

Wen Chao's face slowly turned purple. "Wei Wuxian! You-"

Wen Chao is interrupted as he catches sight of shadow puppets out of the corner of his eyes. He grabs three arrows from his servant and notches them.

Jiang Wanyin finally caught up to Wei Wuxian and stood at his side. He had started making his way towards his shixiong when he noticed that the sun flares were following close behind the lotus flares, signaling trouble.

Crossing his arms across his chest, Wei Wuxian inquired, "Do you need someone to check your eyes, Wen Er-gongzi? Is that why you can't see the big 'Out' sign in the sky?"

Wen Chao lowered his bow slightly before snapping his attention to Wei Wuxian. "What did you just say?!?"

Pointing to the black sun flare in the sky, Jiang Wanyin recounted the rules "Wrong shots and missed shots are eliminated. Are you breaking your own rules?"

"Rules?" Wen Chao snickered. "I am the rules!"

Clicking their tongues, several sect leaders shook their heads at Wen Chao's audacity. The Wens' egos have truly gotten larger as they gained power. To think that the rules they themselves have set out did not apply to them, how arrogant.

"How can a sect’s Young Master be so unreasonable?" Jiang Wanyin asked out loud. "Why bother setting the rules in the first place if you don’t intend to follow it?"

A young man in Baling Ouyang robes stepped up and exclaimed, "He thinks he's above the rules just because he happens to be a Wen."

"What did you say?!?!" Wen Chao angrily demanded as he raised his bow and took aim at the Ouyang disciple.

Ouyang-zongzhu's heart leapt to his throat as he rose from his seat. The young man was his younger brother, Ouyang Qianglei. He had attended the lessons at The Cloud Recesses with all the Sect Heirs this year.

"Ouyang! Watch out!" Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian were too far away to pull the man aside or make it to his side in time. Before Wei Wuxian could pull an arrow to try and divert the arrows' paths, another arrow flew past from above.

The arrow pierced the middle arrow and split it in half as it continued its path to embed in the forehead of a shadow puppet that flew by. The two split halves knocked into the two remaining arrows to knock them safely off their trajectory.

A blue cloud flare lit up in the sky as Lan Wangji landed in front of Wei Wuxian as he lowered his bow. Lan Xichen soon landed beside his brother.

"You! You people…!" Seeing that he's outnumbered and outskilled, Wen Chao stammered out in anger before turning and stomping off the field. The disciples slowly return to the competition one by one as Wei Wuxian turns to Lan Wangji.

Turning to Lan Zhan, Ouyang-zongzhu bowed to thank him for saving his brother. "Baling Ouyang owes Lan Er-gongzi and Gusu Lan our sincerest gratitude for saving my didi."

Lan Xichen and Lan Zhan stood to return his bow. "Saving a life is always important. Ouyang-zongzhu, please do not stand on the ceremony." Lan Xichen replied with a smile.

The scene ripples as Wei Wuxian's eyes land on Lan Wangji. Lan Wangji, dressed in his Gusu Lan robes, and Wei Wuxian, dressed in his black and red robes, stood side by side as each released arrow after arrow in sync with each other. Bouncing from plateau to plateau, the race between the two cultivators dressed in black and white morphed into a choreographed dance. Weaving and dodging around each other like petals caught in the wind. Golden eyes follow black robes as bright laughter fills the night. *'How can someone be so graceful no matter what it is they are doing?'* Wei Wuxian pondered.

Lan Jingyi, "Oh, he's got it bad."

Ouyang Zizhen, "It's so romantic! Fighting together. Hunting together. Spending every day of their lives together. I hope I can find love that is a fraction like theirs."

Lan Zhan watched the scene as his heart warmed. It was a beautiful vision. One that he is determined to make happen. *'This is how Wei Ying imagined our life to be.'*

Snapping out of his internal thoughts to find himself back on the archery field, Wei Wuxian realized Lan Wangji had moved closer to him. "Lan Zhan! Nice shot!"

Lan Wangji nodded in acknowledgement before turning away to take aim at a shadow puppet nearby. The ends of his forehead ribbon fluttered before Wei Wuxian's face, tickling his nose. When Wei Wuxian followed the ribbon to its source, he noticed the forehead ribbon was slanted to one side.

"Uh oh.. " Wei Ying suddenly remembered what he was doing before they were pulled into the array. Lan Zhan held his breath.

"Wangji-xiong!"

"What?" Lan Wangji looked back over his shoulder as he notched an arrow.

"Your forehead ribbon is crooked."

Remembering the boy's teasing earlier in the day, Lan Wangji faced forward once again and took aim. "Ridiculous"

"It's true this time! It really is crooked. If you don't believe me, let me straighten it for you."

"Shameless!" Lan Qiren muttered under his breath.

Lan Jingyi, "Wei-qianbei, please tell me you didn't!"

Jin Ling, "He's had Hanguang-jun's forehead ribbon tied around his wrist already, What's to stop him from grabbing it?"

Wei Wuxian reached up his hand to catch the fluttering ribbon. However, due to his constant teasing of girls growing up by pulling their braids and the fact that the forehead ribbon was already loosened, his hand unconsciously pulled on the ribbon the moment it landed in his hand and the knot quickly untied.

Lan Wangji felt a tug on his forehead ribbon as it loosened from his head. Fingers tightened painfully on the bow in his hand as he slowly turned and locked eyes with Wei Wuxian.

"He looks like he's going to murder you." Jiang Cheng nudged his shixiong.

Wei Wuxian felt a shiver run up his spine at the sheer anger in Lan Wangji's eyes. Wei Wuxian flinched as Lan Wangji's face darkened and immediately held up the ribbon that was still clutched in his hand. "I'm sorry! I didn't do it on purpose! Here... you can tie it back up again."

Lan Wangji's expression darkened even more as his grip tightened harder around his bow to control his anger. His eyes narrowed further at the sight of Wei Wuxian gripping his forehead ribbon causing his grip to tighten until the bow snapped. Lan Wangji quickly snatched the ribbon from the other boy's hands.

"Lan Zhan! I really didn't do it on purpose! You have to believe me!" Wei Ying pouted at Lan Zhan.

Lan Zhan continued to stare at the white cloth, "Wei Ying has copied Gusu Lan's rules many times. Still he does not remember the significance of the Lan forehead ribbon."

Wei Ying, "Aiya! You know my memory is like a sieve! How can you expect me to remember 3,000 rules? Lan Zhan! Don't ignore me! Lan Zhhhhhhaaaaannnnn!"

'What did I do? It's just a forehead ribbon, isn't it?' **Wei Wuxian's heart dropped as he watched Lan Wangji storm off towards his brother and sect disciples. Lan Xichen placed an arm around his younger brother while speaking to him in a low voice. The Lan disciples were occasionally glaring at Wei Wuxian disapprovingly before Lan Wangji shot him one last angry look before walking out of the archery field.**

'I'm always messing things up, aren't I?' Wei Ying locked his eyes to the ground.

"What did you do now?" Jiang Wanyin asked as he came to stand by Wei Wuxian. "Didn't I tell you to leave him alone? Your day just isn't complete unless you dig your own grave at least once, isn't it?"

Hurt flashed in Wei Wuxian's eyes when he turned away and shrugged to cover it up. "The first time I told him his forehead ribbon was crooked, I was tricking him but the second time was real. He didn't believe me. I didn't pull off his forehead ribbon on purpose. Why did he get so angry? Look, now he's left the field."

Jiang Wanyin looked at his shixiong like he was an idiot. "Do you even have to ask? He especially hates you since the Gusu Lan lectures!"

Lan Wangji's eyes widened as he realized how hurt Wei Wuxian was by his overreaction. Reaching for his husband's hand once again, Lan Wangji explained. "Was frustrated that Wei Ying did not know what touching the forehead ribbon meant. Thought Wei Ying did it to mock Gusu Lan."

Wei Ying, "But I really didn't know until now. Lan Zhan! I'm really sorry!"

"Mn. No need for sorry between us." Lan Zhan replied, earning a bright smile from Wei Ying.

After several more hours, the archery competition is called to a close. The disciples line up once again under their Sect flags as the results are announced.

"The champion of this year's archery competition is Yunmeng Jiang Sect's…"

Jiang Cheng perked up as the results were being announced. The winner was from Yunmeng Jiang! He felt good about how he performed in this competition.

"Wei Wuxian."

His face fell slightly but he had expected that to be the result. Perhaps he still made it into the top 4. Lan Wangji had left halfway through so there was a chance for him.

“First place?!?”

“Even with Wen Chao harassing him, Wei Wuxian still ranked 1st?!?!!”

“His skills really are as great as they say.”

“Ah, if only he was a part of our sect!”

“Recruitment would be a breeze!”

“Impressive, Wuxian!” Lan Xichen complimented.

“Definitely. If other disciples have half the skills Wei Wuxian displayed here, Jiang-zongzhu, Yunmeng Jiang will be a formidable force in the future.” Nie Mingjue confirmed.

Jiang Fengmian stood to thank the fellow leaders for their kind words while Yu Ziyuan scowled at his side. "Who could possibly catch up to Wei Wuxian if even the First Jade of Gusu Lan couldn't do it."

Jiang Wanyin’s smile dropped when Wei Wuxian’s name was announced. Although he shouldn’t have been surprised, he had hoped that his efforts would at least bear fruit when Yunmeng Jiang was announced as the champion. Around him, the Jiang disciples were cheering on Wei Wuxian as they picked him up and spun him around.

“Da-Shixiong is the best!”

“We won! Da-Shixiong is the best!”

Wei Ying chanced a glance over at Jiang Cheng. His darkened expression showed he had thought the same as his future self at that moment.

“The runner-up is Gusu Lan Sect’s Lan Xichen.”

Lan-xiansheng nodded in approval as he stroked his beard.

"You did well, Xichen." Lan Qiren complimented as Lan Xichen bowed to his uncle.

“The third place goes to Lanling Jin Sect’s Jin Zixuan.”

Jin Guangshan hid the lower half of his face with his fan but his smirk can still be seen by the sect leaders sitting beside him.

Jiang Yanli clapped and gave Jin Zixuan a smile. Coming in third is still pretty good!

“The fourth place goes to Gusu Lan Sect’s Lan Wangji.”

Lan-xiansheng once again nods in approval. Pride in his nephews clearly written on his face though he makes no comments.

“Wow! Two out of the top four are from Gusu Lan!”

“What? Lan Wangji left halfway through and still ranked 4th?!?!?”

Lan Qiren, "Well done, Wangji."

"Lan Zhan! You're amazing! Even when you left halfway through you still ranked 4th!" Wei Ying excitedly pulled on Lan Zhan's sleeve. However, seeing Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Cheng’s expressions, he quickly released Lan Zhan's sleeve and sat quietly.

Jiang Fengmian laughed to release some of the tension. "Gusu Lan Sect also has such great talents. It is a blessing for the younger generation."

“The Wens didn't even finish in the top four. That's so embarrassing.”

Jiang Wanyin glared at his disciples gossiping where they could be heard. As he didn’t place in the top 4, their words caused his anger to flare up once again so he cleared his throat to catch their attention, “Shut it!”

"I placed 5th. Qinghe Nie's Nie Zonghui placed 6th. Followed by 3rd Shidi in 7th, Runan Wang's Xiao Fengjing in 8th, 5th Shidi in 9th, and Hedong Fu's Fu Minglei in 10th." Jiang Wanyin explained.

"Ranking in the competition ended up being more detrimental than it was glorifying." The Head Shaker shook his head with a sigh.

“Did anyone notice that the top 4 winners are also the Top 4 Young Masters?”

“They’re the Top 4 Young Masters for a reason! It’s not all just based on looks!”

“I can believe that!”

‘How dare these clans act superior to my Qishan Wen?!?!’ **Wen Ruohan’s hand fisted in anger before he plastered a calm expression on his face. Placing his wine goblet down on the table with a thud, Wen Ruohan smiled. “Well done. The four Sects have great talents indeed. Since the competition has ended, I will take my leave now. My guests, please take your time and enjoy yourselves.”**

With that, Wen Rouhan stood and left the dais to the chants of his disciples. Wen Chao followed soon after and left with one final scoff.

Nie Mingjue let out a laugh. "All that pomp and circumstance only to be embarrassed by his disciples!"

"Benefit goes to the humble, while failure awaits the arrogant." Recites Lan-xiansheng.

Jin Guangshan let out a breath of relief as he closed his fan. “You could tell Wen-zongzhu is unhappy that those youngsters made a hit here today while none in his sect ranked. Looks like trouble will be coming our way.”

Jiang Fengmian continued to drink his tea as if he was not too worried about Wen Rouhan's attitude. "It is just a competition. The future of all our Sects lie in the hands of those youngsters. The future is never predictable."

"It seems the future truly is unpredictable. Who would have thought…" Jiang Fengmian sighed.

The image on the cloth begins to flicker and change. The fire lamps of Nightless City flicker in the night breeze as Wen Chao kneeled before the closed doors of his father's quarters.

"Fuqin, I have embarrassed our family due to my incompetence in the Archery Contest. The four families worked together to trap me. I-" his words are cut off by the doors opening. Wen Rouhan steps over the threshold and continues past Wen Chao.

"Chao-er."

"Yes, Fuqin."

A smirk blooms on Wen Rouhan's face as his eyes glint with anticipation. "Since the four Sects are now so arrogant, it's about time we give them a lesson on the rules of immortals and how to show respect for hierarchy."

"Arrogant?" Nie Mingjue scoffs. "Does he think himself Immortal?"

Wen-Shenyi, "The resentful energy is already corrupting his mind. He's enjoying the thrill of power as it eats away at his sanity."

Concerned glances turned towards Wei Wuxian. "Lan Zhan plays Clarity and Cleansing for me after each time I use resentful energy. My core also has increased in how it efficiently neutralizes the resentful energy and converts it to spiritual energy. " Wei Wuxian hurriedly explained. "It took us a few decades but Lan Zhan and I have mastered a method that works and is safe."

"And a couple of destroyed workshops." Mumbled Lan Jingyi to his friends.

Suddenly fire burned across the image and the voice began to narrate once again.

"In the 19th year of the reign of Xuanzheng, the year of Yimao, Qishan Wen successively annexed the Runan Wang Sect."

Flames engulfed the buildings as the pole holding up the sect flag finally snaps and falls to the ground.

"WHAT?!?!"

Voices began to overlap each other as the voice continued.

“Hedong Fu Sect.”

Bodies piled upon each other as flames rip through the buildings.

"OH MY GOD!"

“Pingyang Yao Sect.”

Destruction and devastation greets the viewers as the image once again shifts.

"No! How could this have happened?!?!"

“Pingzhou Shi Sect.”

More bodies piled high and left to rot under the sun.

"My family! My disciples!"

“Anping Rong Sect.”

Blood stained the ground as it pooled underneath the bodies.

"No… no, no, no, no… NO!!!!"

“Mianyang Gu Sect.”

Though civilian bodies were few and far in between...no cultivators were left alive if they were caught.

"There has to be something that we can do!"

“Along with dozens of other clans.”

Each image shown of the named sects only showed death, destruction, and devastation.

Blood drained from the faces of the cultivator as they watched the grisly scenes on the cloth. One by one the Sect Leaders watched as their sects met the same fates as the ones before it. They had thought this was a war that only involved the Great Sects. Now? Now it seems the small unknown sects were the first to be annihilated.

“Where there is dispute, blood will flow. Fearing for their own sect’s safety, no clans dared to speak out against Qishan Wen. One by one the small sects fell.”

Blood began to pool and spill down a flight of stairs as Wen Rouhan came into focus on the cloth. His face was contorted into a maniacal expression as he pins a flag on the map where Gusu is marked clearly.

“That year, Wen Ruohan ordered his eldest son, Wen Xu, to The Cloud Recesses.”

The past Lans' eyes widened in shock. They knew war was coming but this… they had not been expecting it to be like this.

"Accusing Gusu Lan Sect of withholding impertinent knowledge that benefits all other clans, the Wens laid siege on the Cloud Recesses in the name of Indoctrination to rid the Lans of their arrogance and self-importance."

Lan Qiren, "Gusu Lan has never withheld impertinent knowledge. Our library is open to those who seek knowledge and requests have never been denied."

Lan-xiansheng, "It did not matter. They needed an excuse to attack one of the Great Sects. Just like they needed an excuse to attack Qinghe Nie and then Yunmeng Jiang."

Nie Mingjue scoffs, "Qinghe Nie will be ready for them."

The image of a bloodied sword focuses on the screen. Before it, several disciples in white robes fall to the ground. Their throats slashed.

As more white robed disciples charge down the steps, the front gate of The Cloud Recesses comes into view.

Each disciple who came to defend was outnumbered and slaughtered where they stood.

"KILL!" came Wen Xu’s order as they breached the gates and tore down the wards.

Lan Sizhui and Lan Jingyi stared at the cloth, horrified at what they're seeing. These were not just any sects' disciples. These were Senior Gusu Lan disciples who gave their lives to protect their home. Seniors they never got the chance to meet.

Lan Jingyi, "At… at least Gusu Lan has a chance now since Wei-qianbei's wards can't be easily broken."

Lan Xichen looked to Lan Jingyi in surprise. "The Elders allowed Wei Wuxian to alter the Cloud Recesses' wards?"

Zewu-jun, "Shufu and I overruled their objections."

Lan-xiansheng, "As much trouble as A-Xian causes, there is no denying the power behind his arrays and talismans. You would be hard pressed to find a major flaw in something he had fully dedicated himself to. They will never fail unless we allow it."

Wei Wuxian, "I will leave notes with Little Me, Little Lan Zhan, and Little Huaisang regarding the wards I've created for Gusu and Yunmeng. Nie Huaisang can explain to Nie-zongzhu the changes made for Qinghe. And… Jin Ling can discuss Lanling Jin's with his father."

"You truly think highly of yourself, don't you?" Yu Ziyuan glared at Wei Wuxian as the man spoke, causing her family to look at her in shock. "Are the Great Sects so weak that they cannot protect themselves? Is Yunmeng so lacking that we need a servant to save us?"

"San Niang-" Jiang Fengmian attempted to halt his wife.

"A good leader knows when to concede and embrace their shortcomings." Jiang Wanyin interrupted. "A Sect is not weak because they accept help from others. A Sect is weak when its leader stubbornly holds onto their pride and compares themselves to others only to find themselves lacking. I did not rebuild Yunmeng Jiang from ashes only for it to fall once again due to weak wards."

"Well said, A-Cheng." Jiang Fengmian commended with a smile. "I can see the great leader you've become."

Jiang Wanyin's heart soared at his father's approval. These words that he wanted to hear over the past decades from his father. Always wondering if his parents would be proud of the man he has become. Now realizing his mother will never be satisfied with anything he accomplishes, at least he had made his father proud.

Jiang Cheng watched wide-eyed as his future self received the praise that he's been wishing for. His future self is proof that he can be the Sect Leader his father was proud of. He just needs to have a chat with his older self before they return to their respective timelines.

"I will accept on behalf of Yunmeng Jiang. Thank you, Da-Shixiong!" Jiang Cheng caught a glimpse of his father’s nodding approval as he bowed to Wei Wuxian. He had chosen the correct course of action.

Nie Mingjue, "Madam Yu may not be appreciative of such a precious gift but Qinghe Nie will gladly accept any assistance, Wuxian."

Grateful for any chance to spend time with his future son, Jin Zixuan promptly answered, "Lanling Jin humbly accepts any guidance that you can spare for us, Wei-gongzi."

In the Hanshi, Lan-xiansheng and Zewu-jun are in deep meditation. Lan-xiansheng was focusing on healing. Their jade tokens alerted them that there were uninvited visitors at the gate before they felt the wards break.

Su She came running through the doors in a panic. "Zewu-jun! Wen Xu has blocked every entrance exit around the mountain. He says he will set a fire to clean up the place so that it will be reborn from the firelight."

Hearing those words, Lan-xiansheng spit up a mouthful of blood.

"Shufu!" Zewu-jun quickly stood by his uncle's side.

"Shufu!" Lan Xichen stood from his seat at the same time as his future self on the screen. "How did you get so injured, Shufu?"

Lan-xiansheng, "Wen Xu arrived the day before and demanded that we hand over you and Wangji to Qidhan Wen for Indoctrination. You were at Qinghe and Wangji was on a night hunt with a few junior disciples. Wen Xu took exception to my refusal and attacked using fire talismans to injure myself and several senior disciples before we pulled back behind the wards. You returned the following day once word reached you."

Lan Qiren, "They're going to set fire to the Cloud Recesses? The ancient texts… Wangji, make plans to move the ancient texts and scrolls into the Cold Cave and seal them in to protect them against the elements."

Lan Zhan, "Yes, Shufu."

Su She watched himself on the cloth for the first time. Watching others on the cloth felt different from watching oneself. He took in the details that normally one could not see in themselves. 'Is that really me?'

Lan-xiansheng, "Qishan Wen truly is sinister and vicious."

Zewu-jun worriedly held out his handkerchief. "Shufu, there was poison in Wen Xu's Fire Talisman. Please try to remain calm."

Lan-xiansheng held up his hand, "Where is Wangji? Ask him to leave as soon as possible and do not come back."

"Shufu-"

"Zewu-jun! Zewu-jun! Outside-" A terrified Lan disciple screamed as he ran into the Hanshi, interrupting Zewu-jun.

The past Lan frowned at the disciple's actions caused by his terror.

"Lan Sect disciples!" Standing from his seat at the table, Zewu-jun reprimanded the disciples. "Face danger fearlessly! Have you forgotten what I have taught you before?"

Nie Mingjue, "Well said, Xichen! Cultivators should face dangers head on without fear or you have lost before the fight even began."

"Even under attack the First Jade can remain so calm!"

"Truly a testament to the Lan clan's demeanor."

The second disciple took a steadying breath before reporting again, "Zewu-jun, the Wen Sect have broken all the wards around the Cloud Recesses. They are forcing captured disciples to set fire everywhere. The fires have nearly reached the disciples' living quarters."

Hesitating for only a moment, Zewu-jun turned to bow to his uncle. "Shufu, things are urgent now. Gusu Lan could be facing a devastating disaster. I beg you, Shufu, please take the ancient books in the Forbidden Library and leave the Cloud Recesses."

Lan-xiansheng shook his head as he looked upon Zewu-jun and the Lan disciples, "If I leave, what about you? What about the rest of Gusu Lan?"

Zewu-jun, "We will all retreat to the Cold Cave. Without a Lan forehead ribbon, they cannot enter."

Lan Qiren watched on as he could already guess what his future self would ultimately decide. It was a choice he would make again in a heartbeat. There is no question what is best for Gusu Lan.

When Lan-xiansheng continued refusing to leave, Zewu-jun tried to appeal to him again . "Shufu! Please look at the big picture. No matter what happens, we have to save the foundation of Gusu Lan at all costs!"

"Xichen, please do not say another word. You go and I will stay." Lan-xiansheng held up a hand to stop Zewu-jun's next words. "If you still consider me your uncle, go now."

Zewu-jun, "Shufu! I am the future master of Gusu Lan. I swore that I would never leave the Cloud Recesses."

Lan-xiansheng grabbed Zewu-jun's arms to lift him up from his bow. Looking into Zewu-jun's eyes, Lan-xiansheng's eyes softened. "It is because you are the future master that you should be the one to leave. Only when the ancient texts are not destroyed and its master survives, the Lan Sect of Gusu can not be eliminated."

Lan Xichen and Lan Zhan looked at each other. Unable to utter a word. Uncle was sacrificing himself.

"Shufu." Seeing the determination in his uncle's eyes, Zewu-jun respectfully kowtowed to Lan-xiansheng prompting the Lan disciples in the room to follow his lead. This may be the last time they will be together like this.

"Pass my order, all Inner disciples should bring those without the Lan Clan ribbons into the Cold Cave.

Ouyang Zizhen, "Lan-xiansheng is amazing!"

Lan Jingyi, "I can’t believe we're watching this… they history texts described this day but this! This is intense!"

Lan Qiren's eyes never left the cloth as he memorized as much as he could. Noticing that neither himself nor Xichen had mentioned Qingheng-jun in their exchange. 'Did Xiongzhang even leave seclusion to defend Gusu Lan?'

The halls of the Cloud Recesses fill with red Qishan Wen robes as Senior Lan disciples valiantly fight back to allow the juniors and elders a chance to run. Little by little they

become outnumbered and are cut down.

Lan Wangji stood before the Library Pavilion to buy time for his brother to flee with the ancient texts. Blood dripped from Bichen and he labored to catch his breath.

"Wangji!" Lan Xichen breathed out.

More Wen disciples join the fray to bring down the already exhausted Lan when an unfamiliar sword cuts through the first line of attackers. An older Lan cultivator stood protectively before Lan Wangji.

The Lans stood at the sight of the man who stood before Lan Wangji on the cloth. Neither could believe their eyes as they watched the man fight. Lan Qiren released the breath he didn't know he was holding. 'He left seclusion to defend his family. There is hope!'

"Fuqin." whispered Lan Zhan. 'He came to protect me."

Lan Jingyi stared wide-eyed at the scene, "Is that… who I think it is?"

Lan Sizhui nodded with a smile, "It's Qingheng-jun!"

Although he had locked himself away for so long, his skills never diminished. Qingheng-jun was known to be a strong cultivator before he disappeared from the eyes of the cultivation world. Many believed Lan Wangji would one day be stronger than his father. Seeing the scene on the cloth, everyone believed that now more than ever.

"Go!" The man shouted to a wide-eyed Lan Wangji. With a deep respectful bow, Lan Wangji took off towards the back hills to find his uncle.

The back hills come into view as disciples run towards the cliffside. As more gathered, Senior disciples form a shield behind Lan-xiansheng.

"All the disciples are scattered by the Wens. Lan-xiansheng, let's get in quickly!" Su She shouted as he made his way to the cliffside.

Lan-xiansheng stood his ground. "I will wait here."

Barely a moment passed before Wen Xu landed before Lan-xiansheng and the Seniors. Lan-xiansheng drew his sword and flew towards Wen Xu intent on driving him back to give time for the disciples' escapes.

Lan Jingyi, "I have a new appreciation for Lan-xiansheng after watching this! I thought he was impressive at the Burial Mounds but this tops that!"

His injuries proved to be his downfall as he weakened and continued to spit up blood the longer he fought. With a single kick to the chest, Wen Xu sent Lan-xiansheng flying back into the group of seniors. A handful formed a protective barrier before him.

A blast from the guqin pushed an already attacking Wen Xu back several feet as more Wens joined their Young Master.

"Shufu, let's go!" Lan Wangji helped his uncle to his feet and forced him into the Cold Caves as the disciples covered their retreat. Their forehead ribbons allow them to phase through the cliffside wall with ease.

Wei Ying, "I wonder if we could amend this to protect against fire and other destructive measures?"

"You can." Wei Wuxian laughed, "We also amended the wards so they would not recognize a stolen forehead ribbon or Jade token. Entering or Exiting."

Wen Xu pulled his sword from the back of a Lan disciple and swung his sword at Su She's neck, stopping his escape. Disciples who were not cut down, were caught and forced to kneel before the cliffside wall where the rest had disappeared into.

"Lan Wangji! I will kill all of the disciples that I find in the Cloud Recesses one by one. If you don't come out!" Wen Xu taunted.

Inside the cave, Lan Wangji is being held back by Senior disciples while Lan-xiansheng meditated.

"Wangji."

"Shufu, It was here where Lan Yi told me that we should keep our conscience clear." Lan Wangji replied. Seeing his nephew's resolve, Lan-xiansheng closed his eyes and nodded to give Lan Wangji permission to leave the cave.

Jiang Fengmian, "Lan Er-gongzi, I can see now why you are the Chief Cultivator. There is no better choice."

Lan Wangji nodded his head in acknowledgement but made no effort to respond. Seeing his attitude, Su She couldn't hold back. "How many decades have passed and you're still just as arrogant. Where do you get the confidence, Lan Wangji?"

Wei Wuxian chuckled low as he turned to face Su She. The look he gave him made Su She shake in his seat. "Hanguang-jun has the skill and knowledge to back up his so-called arrogance unlike the good-for-nothing that keeps running his mouth."

At the cliffside, Wen Xu stood before the wall. "I will ask again. How do we get in?"

When no replies came from the disciples aside from hateful glares, Wen Xu cut the throat of the nearest disciple.

Nie Mingjue, "I must commend Gusu Lan for having such fiercely protective disciples. They are fearless and loyal in the face of danger."

Sounds of agreement came from the others as the gossiping continued.

When no one still spoke up, he put his sword against the throat of the disciple who was hiding behind another disciple. "SPEAK!"

With the sword against his throat, Su She could no longer pretend to be brave. "Ribbon! The forehead ribbon! Only the inner disciples' forehead ribbon can allow entrance!"

Wen Xu, "Where is Lan Xichen?"

Su She, "He... he escaped with ancient books while Lan Wangji's defended the Library!"

"Su She, you are such a coward!"

"How could the Gusu Lan Sect have someone like you as a disciple?"

"Now that you've banished him from the Cloud Recesses, this is one less thing to worry about." Nie Mingjue addressed Lan Xichen.

Lan Xichen frowned. Hearing about the betrayal was hard to believe but to see it happening. Lan Xichen felt dread creep up on him as he realized that things were only to get worse from here on out.

The voices of the disciples drifted to Lan Wangji as he stepped out from the Cold Caves to see the kneeling Lan disciples being cut down beside Su She. His eyes narrowed on Su She as Wen Xu laughed at his side.

Wen Xu retracted his sword and fixed the collar on Su She's robe. "Thank you for the insightful information. I will make sure to give you a handsome reward for your troubles. Ah, Lan Wangji! So good of you to join us!"

"Release the Lan disciples. Remove your disciples from the Cloud Recesses. I will go with you to Qishan."

"Very Well! Set him free. Oh! But aren't you a powerful cultivator?" Before Lan Wangji could react, Wen Xu shot forward and smashed his left leg with his sword, breaking it. "Can't have you fighting back while we're on the road now, can we?"

Gasps sprung forth as Wen Xu broke Lan Wangji's leg.

"Despicable." Nie Mingjue spat out.

News of the Cloud Recesses' fate reached the other sects as they received Wen Ruohan's decree for Indoctrination.

"Just like that, the centuries-old paradise was destroyed overnight.

The Lan Sect Leader was fatally wounded."

"Fatally..." Lan Qiren breathed out as his eyes teared up. His brother would not survive this tragedy if nothing is done to prevent it.

Nie Mingjue placed a hand on Lan Xichen's shoulder to let him know that he's not alone. Jiang Wanyin held Zewu-jun's hand tightly when he took a stuttering breath.

Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying each respectively grabbed Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan's hands.

"The Library Pavilion burnt to ash by its own master, threatened with the slaughter of his disciples.

The Second Jade of Gusu Lan was forced to march to Qishan on a broken leg.

The First Jade of Gusu Lan was missing… nowhere to be found."

The Head Shaker, "It only gets worse from here."

Discord Amongst the Lotus

Chapter Summary

Orders for Indoctrination arrives.

Madam Yu's mouth gets her in trouble... again.

Lan-xiansheng basically tells Madam You to check herself before she wrecks herself.

Chapter Notes

Guys! Episode 32 of Founder of Diabolism! Wangxian in red... I damn near lost my mind! I wish the episodes were longer 😭😭😭

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“But what can we do to prevent this war from happening?” Jiang Yanli asked as she held her hands over her heart.

Ling Wen, “Time must remain balanced otherwise the consequences of messing with time will be dire. There are set events that must occur and the Sunshot Campaign is one of those events.”

Any hope the past cultivators had to prevent the war from happening were dashed at the Civil God's words. If they can’t prevent the war from happening, how can they ensure that they will win this time around?

Xie Lian nodded in agreement, “However, that doesn’t mean we can’t minimize the devastation around it.”

“Minimize the devastation?” Nie Mingjue asked.

“Mn.” Xie Lian smiled.

Pei Ming stood from his seat to face Nie Mingjue. “As you are watching what is to come, you can learn what your strengths and weaknesses are as well as the Wens’ strengths and weaknesses. Look for their battle tactics and how it can be countered.” Pei Ming gestured to the future travelers, “You have resources here with first hand knowledge of the Sunshot Campaign. They’ve already fought that war. They’ve already bled and shed blood for it. If you still can’t win, that is your shortcoming and no one else is to blame.”

Wei Wuxian, “We can assist you in what you need. But I have conditions.”

“Conditions?”

“We can’t just accept without a guarantee that it will succeed!”

“Right!”

“How can we put all our trust in them?”

“True!”

“He’s a demonic cultivator! Why should we trust him?!?!?”

"Didn't he turn on us in the end?!?!"

"That's right!"

Lan Jingyi stood from his seat, “Hey! He’s offering to help you win the war but you still doubt him?”

Jin Ling scoffed, “Looks like they haven’t been paying enough attention.”

Wei Wuxian shrugged, “Accept or not, it’s your timeline that’s affected. Not ours.”

Seeing that the past cultivators were still hesitant, the future cultivators decided to return to the viewing. The Head Shaker sighed internally. *'Looks like I'll have to bring up the Sword Tomb sooner than expected. It will be a while before the viewing will show anything regarding it. Da-ge and Er-ge need to accept Wei Wuxian's help before they miss the opportunity.'*

The voice of Baoshan Sanren rang throughout the hall as words filled the white cloth.

"Qishan Wen sent messengers to each Sect to deliver orders for Indoctrination. Citing the Sects' failure to properly teach their descendants and allowing their talents to go to waste, the Wens demanded each Sect to dispatch an inner disciple and 19 other disciples to Qishan within three days so that they can be properly taught."

“What?!?! I don’t want to go! They can’t make me!”

Nie Mingjue sighed and touched his forehead. He's very familiar with that voice. Meng Yao shook his head before lowering it to hide the smile growing on his face.

“Nie Er-gonzi! It’s the Chief Cultivator’s commands. If we refuse, it will start a war. There’s nothing that Chifeng-zun can do. You must go!” Meng Yao explained.

Nie Huaisang paced back and forth as he wracked his brain for an excuse not to go. “Yao-ge! If I go, there’s no way I’m going to make it out of there alive! The Wens are capable of anything! You might as well kill me right here and now!”

“Nie Er-”

“NIE HUAISANG!” Chifeng-zun’s voice shook the room as Nie Huaisang dove to hide behind Meng Yao. “Y-Yao-ge! Save me!”

Meng Yao internally sighed. *‘If I save you, who’s going to save me?’*

Chifeng-zun walked through the door followed by Nie Zonghui. *Baxia* was strapped to his back as if he was preparing to go to battle. “Meng Yao, go pack Huaisang’s bag. He’ll be heading out today. The sooner he leaves, the sooner he can return from this sorry excuse of an indoctrination. The Wen-dogs believe themselves more knowledgeable than the Lans. Their jealousy is truly legendary.”

Lan Jingyi, "Whoa! Chifeng-zun is intimidating already as it is. With *Baxia* strapped to his back, it's downright terrifying!"

Jin Ling shivered at the memory of a *Baxia* wielding fierce corpse Nie Mingjue coming after him single-mindedly, "It's even more terrifying to be the one at the end of *Baxia's* blade. I had nightmares for days afterwards."

"Why was *Baxia* directed at you?" Jin Zixuan questioned his son as he glared at Nie Mingjue.

"Because I have Jin blood." Jin Ling automatically replied before he caught himself. "It's a long story, A-Die. I'm sure it'll be shown later."

'Because he had Jin blood?' Jin Zixuan frowned and looked towards his parents. His mother had a frown on her face as well. His father was looking between the two versions of Wei Wuxian with a smirk on his face. *'What is he up to?'*

“Da-ge….” Nie Huaisang whined as Meng Yao bowed to Chifeng-zun and left to pack. “You know I wouldn’t last a day there! Zonghui-ge! Please convince Da-ge!”

Nie Zonghui, “Huaisang, you know if there was any other choice we wouldn’t have given in to their demands. There’ll be others going with you. Stick to them and they’ll protect you. Behave, alright?”

Nie Huaisang was still pouting as he and the others mounted their sabers and left for Qishan. Only when their silhouettes were no longer visible did Chifeng-zun turn to leave.

Ouyang Zizhen, "Nie-zongzhu, who is that?"

"You don't recognize Nie Zonghui?" Nie Huaisang asked as he looked at Nie Mingjue. The Nie Brothers then stared at the Ouyang heir in shock as he shook his head no.

Reluctantly, Nie Huaisang spoke. "How is that possible? If I'm Sect Leader, then he would have been by my side as well. Did… did he not survive the war?"

"He survived the war." The Head Shaker spoke up.

Nie Huaisang, "Then-"

"He didn't survive Jin Guangyao." The Head Shaker interrupted. Gasps filled the hall while Nie Mingjue's face darkened.

Meng Yao's face paled as he looked up in shock to find all eyes on him. "But Nie Zonghui … He has never caused me any harm. Why would I hurt Nie-gongzi…?"

His words drifted off as he looked over to Jin Guangshan. *'Did my father…?'*

The Head Shaker scoffed and turned away from Meng Yao. "I can see it in your face that you know very well why you would do such a thing."

Chifeng-zun and Nie Zonghui were sitting at the dining table discussing the strategies for tomorrow while they ate dinner when Meng Yao returned with news of Nie Huaisang's safe arrival at Qishan.

Chifeng-zun, "Meng Yao, you haven't eaten yet. Sit and have dinner with us."

Before he could reply, they were interrupted by a lookout guard. "Chifeng-zun! Word was sent that the Wens attacked and burned down the Cloud Recesses! Lan-zongzhu and Lan-xiansheng were gravely injured. Lan Er-gongzi was dragged to Qishan and Zewu-jun… Zewu-jun is missing! They are now marching toward our gates, claiming that we have been spreading defamatory lies about Wen-zongzhu causing the former Sect Leader's death!"

Meng Yao's heart dropped and his face paled at the news, *'Zewu-jun is missing? This is bad. I have to find a way to help him.'*

Zewu-jun watched with a sad smile on his face. This was the A-Yao he had chosen to remember. The man he was before he was corrupted by the obsession to gain his father's approval. The man who still put others' needs before his father's.

"Speak of the Devil and they will come. Today we will avenge my father and Gusu Lan!" Smirking, Chifeng-zun summoned *Baxia* and assembled his men before the gates of the Unclean Realm to "greet" their incoming guests. Meng Yao used this distraction to slip away quietly.

"KILL!" came the order from Wen Chao as he stood at a safe distance from the fighting.

"What a coward!"

"He wants the glory of a victory but is afraid to join the battle. What a disgrace!"

The cultivators' words made the Daruma Wen Chao screech and shake in anger. It rolled around only to bump into the legs of the chairs around it. Hua Cheng looked down at it before giving it a kick to slam it towards the wall. "Noisy."

"They waited until the contingent left for Qishan before they attacked so they could still have hostages if the attack failed." Lan Qiren observed.

Nie Mingjue scoffed and crossed his arms over his chest. "Wen Rouhan sent the wrong son to Qinghe. Wen Xu would have been more of a challenge."

"First, they used the excuse that Gusu Lan was arrogantly hiding imperative knowledge to attack Gusu Lan. Then, they claimed the Nies spread defamatory lies to attack Qinghe Nie. Following this pattern…" Lan Xichen frowned at the white cloth before him.

"Jin Guangshan started catering to Wen Rouhan after the Archery Competition so that he wouldn't attack the Jins." Wen-shenyi added.

Jiang Cheng, "So that leaves- "

"Yunmeng Jiang." Jiang Fengmian stated as his eyes remained glued to the cloth in front.

"And what half assed excuse did they use to attack Yunmeng Jiang?" Yu Ziyuan demanded.

"The same excuse you yourself have been using since A-Die brought him back from Yiling." Jiang Wanyin spoke up.

No one needed to ask to clarify as they knew what Jiang Wanyin's words meant. Jiang Fengmian frowned as he noticed Wei Ying's expression before he looked away.

The sounds of battle recede as the view shifts. Sunlight peeks through slow moving clouds and birds chirp to signal the dawn of a new day.

One by one, kites begin to pop up in the sky. Slowly they drift further away from view before arrows rained down and shot them down. Only 2 remain flying in the sky.

"Shooting kites?"

"Is this another form of training?"

The kites fly further away as an arrow is aimed at it. Purple eyes flick between the kite and Wei Wuxian, who stood shoulder to shoulder with Jiang Wanyin, who had a smirk on his face. The kite still wasn't far enough away.

When his kite flew past the point where he was confident that he'd be able to hit it, Jiang Wanyin let loose his arrow. It cut across the distance and pierced the red center of the kite to bring it down.

Jiang Wanyin and the fellow shidis whooped in celebration, "It hit!!"

"Impressive, Jiang-gongzi!" Lan Xichen complimented with a smile. Jiang Cheng froze at the sight of his smile before a red blush crept up his neck and face.

"Mn! Our husband has always been talented in archery since he was young." Zewu-jun joined in as his husband turned red at his side.

Wei Wuxian collapsed on his husband laughing as Wei Ying clutched at his side and rolled on the floor laughing at his flustered shidi. "Oh my God, your face! A-Cheng! Your face…"

"SHUT UP, WEI WUXIAN!" Both shouted at their Da-shixiong.

One kite left flying in the sky. Wei Wuxian stood with his right hand above brow. It looked like he wasn't going to shoot anytime soon.

"Da-shixiong! You can do it!"

"Go, Da-shixiong!"

Jiang Wanyin, "It's flown pretty far already. Are you sure you can hit it, Wei Wuxian?"

Wei Wuxian smirked before notching an arrow, “What do you think?”

Drawing his bow to its limit, Wei Wuxian loosened his arrow. It cut smoothly through the air in a gentle arch. A direct hit!

"Yunmeng Jiang truly does have the best archers of all the Sects. Jiang-gongzi and Wuxian are truly a testament to your methods of training." Nie Mingjue complimented. Lan Qiren nodded in agreement. Wei Wuxian is a menace but his skills can't be overlooked.

Shouts ring out as Wei Wuxian finds himself tackled to the ground by a group of shidis. Jiang Wanyin let out a huff under his breath and swallowed down the little green-eyed monster creeping up his chest.

“Good shot!”

“Da-Shixiong is the best!”

Seeing Jiang Wanyin’s darkened countenance, Wei Wuxian called for order, “Alright, you know the routine. Let’s move!”

Nie Huaisang became curious about the kites. "Jiang-xiong! Are the kites painted simply with a red dot or do you guys paint more complex designs?"

Jiang Cheng, "It's usually faster to just paint the red dot on the kites after they're made."

Nie Huaisang stared at Jiang Cheng in shock. "You make the kites too?"

Wei Ying laughed, "Nie-xiong! With how many kites we shoot down, Yunmeng Jiang would be destitute if we keep buying them at the market! Every disciple knows how to make and paint their own kites."

Nie Huaisang, "That makes sense…"

Lan Jingyi. "Jin-xiaojie! Can you make kites too?"

Jin Ling, "I told you to stop calling me that! Of course, I know how to make a kite!"

"Jiang-zongzhu, is this game part of your training?" Lan Qiren asked.

"Each disciple has to shoot down their own kites. The object is to allow the kite to fly further out of their comfort zone each time until you can hit it." Jiang Fengmian explained. "They practice accuracy, distance, posture, and most importantly...patience and perseverance."

"The one whose arrow and kite are the closest to the shooting line has to pick up all the kites." Jiang Wanyin smiled but it didn't reach his eyes. "If they don't want to be the one to pick up all the arrows and kites, they have to shoot further."

"It's always Sixth Shidi who has to pick up the kites no matter how much he'd improved." Wei Wuxian absent-mindedly spoke with a sad smile on his face.

Jiang Fengmian and Lan Qiren watched the two men as they spoke. The heartbreak present in their demeanor can easily be seen. The same heartbreak was reflected in Zewu-jun and Lan Wangji's eyes as they listened to their husbands speak. It was in that moment that they truly saw how much these boys have changed over the years.

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin sat to the side with the shidis as Sixth Shidi ran to collect the kites and arrows. Two purple-robbed figures with short swords strapped to their sides stepped out from behind the tree line and blocked the disciples' path. Cursing their luck, the disciples stopped where they stood and mentally prepared for verbal lashing to come.

Holding a kite and arrow in her hand, Jinzhu cast a blank look before asking, "Who do these belong to?"

Seeing the shidis' pale faces, Wei Wuxian stepped forward. "They're mine."

"An honest one, aren't you?" Jinzhu shot him a glare and snorted before stepping to the side. Yu Ziyuan stepped past her two maids with a stern face.

"A man is judged by the company they keep." Baoshan Sanren casually remarked. "Even your personal maids regard him with disdain. What does that say about your character, Yu-furen?"

Yu Ziyuan clamped down her jaw to keep from retorting. Nothing good will come from offending Baoshan Sanren directly.

"A-Niang!" Jiang Wanyin scrambled up from where he sat.

"Yu-furen." chorused the disciples as they simultaneously bowed to the Jiang leader.

Her face rearranged into a scowl as her gaze swept across the disciples. Out of habit, her hand clenched around the sword hanging at her hip as her eyes landed on Wei Wuxian before stopping on Jiang Wanyin, "Messing around again? Come here, let me see you properly."

When Jiang Wanyin came to her side, Yu Ziyuan gripped his arm. "Look at you! You're seventeen already but here you are still acting like an ignorant child! There's no

improvement in your cultivation at all!”

The Jiang disciples averted their eyes to the ground as this was a familiar scene for them. Sneering at Wei Wuxian, Yu Ziyuan slapped Jiang Wanyin's shoulder and continued. “What is your status to be fooling around with inconsequential people? Who knows what sewers they’ll be swimming in years from now but you? You’re going to be the next Jiang Sect Leader!

The cultivators frowned at the harsh words as the Immortal Beings and future travelers' faces darkened with anger.

"That's... a harsh thing to say to children."

"As an adult, even I'm uncomfortable hearing that."

"Inconsequential?" Hua Cheng snarled as he stood from his seat. Xie Lian quickly grabbed his arm to prevent him from attacking Yu Ziyuan.

"A-Ying." Shi Qingxuan took a calming breath before turning to Wei Ying. "How often does that Yu woman call you that?"

Wei Ying looked up in surprise when his name was called but quickly averted his eyes and chuckled nervously. "Ah, I… stopped minding it long ago."

Hua Cheng shared a look with He Xuan before both men walked to the door and left without a word. Xie Lian sat back in his seat after giving Wei Wuxian a smile.

Wei Wuxian knew that smile. *'Shit… we're in trouble.'*

Jiang Wanyin lowered his head and stumbled back a step as he rubbed at his shoulder. Standing in Yu Ziyuan's blindspot, 10th Shidi slightly peeked at Wei Wuxian and stuck out his tongue at him. Wei Wuxian raised an eyebrow at him and sighed. *'And it's about me once again.'*

Yu Ziyuan, “Wei Ying! What trouble are you stirring up this time?”

Arranging his posture into a bow, Wei Wuxian awaited the expected verbal lashing.

Astonished, Jin Ling couldn't help asking. "It happens so often that he just… expects it?"

Ouyang Zizhen, "There’s only so much a person can handle, though."

Yu Ziyuan, "Don’t drag Jiang Cheng along to fool around like you. If you don’t seek progress, that's your choice. You’re nothing but a bad influence on him.”

“I don’t seek progress?" Surprise crossed Wei Wuxian's face before he blurted out, "Am I not the one with the most progress in the entire Yunmeng Jiang?”

Purple lightning sparked from *Zidian* as Yu Ziyuan's face darkened. The atmosphere dropped several degrees and the Jiang disciples shivered in fear.

Jiang Wanyin hastily shouted, “Wei Wuxian, shut up!”

Lan Jingyi, "This… this explains so much! Wei-qianbei! Even if you don’t feel the injustice, we feel it for you!"

" *Before preparing to improve the world, first look around your own home three times* ." Lan-xiansheng lectured. "Perhaps Yu-furen should heed these words before casting doubt on others."

"You!" Yu Ziyuan bit out before reeling in her seat in pain due to her broken arm.

Wei Wuxian, "Yu-furen, it isn't that we want to shoot kites here. Right now, none of us are allowed to leave for night hunts. Since the Wens have taken them all for themselves, even if we wanted to go, there isn’t anywhere for us to go."

Jiang Wanyin, "A-Niang, you yourself made it clear to us and A-Die. Stay home and not go out so that we won’t provoke or even fight for prey with the Wens."

“This time, even if you don’t want to, you’ll have to leave anyway.” Yu Ziyuan smiled bitterly before turning away and walking back towards the hall. Jinzhu and Yinzhu shot glares at Wei Wuxian before following their mistress. Yu Ziyuan's words caused Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin to look at each other in confusion.

"They abused their power in such a way?"

"Wen Rouhan needs to be removed as Chief Cultivator!"

"Night-hunting has always been divided according to the sect lands. They have no right to bar others from night-hunting!"

"So that's how they kept everyone in one place so they could easily attack." Nie Mingjue discerned.

Lan Xichen nodded, "By prohibiting others from night-hunting, they're forced to remain on their own lands and become agitated by inaction."

Jiang Fengmian sat at the center of Lotus Pier's dining hall. Yu Ziyuan sat at a table of her own to his right while Jiang Wanyin sat to his left with Jiang Yanli beside him and Wei Wuxian beside her.

Jiang Wanyin, “The Wens have no shame, do they?”

Wei Wuxian, “This isn't the first time they've acted so shamelessly. They think they’re the sun reigning over the Sects because Wen Rouhan has been Chief Cultivator all these years. They've been prohibiting others from night-hunting since last year. How much prey and land were stolen by them?"

Jiang Fengmian cautioned, “Watch your words. Focus on your meal.”

"For that long?"

Lan Qiren stroked his beard and hummed, "If they are also using the night-hunting ban as an excuse to destroy Sects who are against them, no one will be the wiser until it is too late."

Jin Zixuan, "And with no one willing to offend the Wens by speaking up, they've essentially already won."

Chastised, Wei Wuxian lowered his head and continued eating until there was a tug on his sleeve. He looked up as Jiang Yanli pushed a plate of peeled lotus seeds towards him with a smile that he returned and a soft, "Thank you, Shijie."

Yu Ziyuan spoke coldly, “Eat, eat, eat! How can you bear to eat at a time like this? They'll be in Qishan in a few days. We won’t even know if they will be given any food. Why not start missing a couple meals now so they can get used to it later!"

The Head Shaker's face scrunched in disgust, "The food they gave us made the meals at Cloud Recesses seem like it came from a top rated restaurant."

Wen Qionglin, "The kitchens were ordered to serve them only spoiled food that was left out for the day. It was… hard to watch."

"Spoiled food?!?!"

"That's food not even fit for animals to eat!"

Jiang Fengmian replied blandly, “Why worry over it now? No matter what, today’s meal still should be eaten.”

"Worry? Of course I'm going to worry!" Yu Ziyuan snapped as her patience ran out. "Jiang Fengmian! At a time like this, how can you still be so indifferent? Even a mere maid from Qishan Wen dares to act superior to us but still you stay quiet!"

Slamming her hand down on the table, Yu Ziyuan became even angrier at Jiang Fengmian's lackluster reaction. "Of the 20 disciples, they even dared to demand an inner disciple. That means A-Cheng or A-Li will have to go and become their hostages. What re-education? What retraining? When is it Qishan Wens' turn to meddle in other Sects' businesses?"

Jiang Wanyin hurriedly volunteered to waylay Yu Ziyuan, “Mom! It's OK. Don’t be so angry. I’ll go.”

“Of course you’ll go!" Yu Ziyuan scolded. "Were you expecting your sister to go? Look at her! No cultivation to speak of. Happily sitting there peeling lotus seeds like she's the servant, not the mistress! A-Li, stop peeling those damn seeds!"

Jiang Yanli's smile dropped. She and Wei Wuxian bent their heads and quietly ate their meals.

"San Niang." Sighed Jiang Fengmian.

Yu Ziyuan, “What? Did you not like something that I said? Are you not happy to hear that word? Servant? Jiang Fengmian, tell me, do you intend to send him as well?”

Jiang Fengmian, “I will leave that decision up to him. He can go if he wants to-”

'This can't turn into another argument. She's going to target A-Cheng or Shijie next.' **Wei Wuxian looked up from his table and interrupted Jiang Fengmian, “I'll go.”**

"How wonderful! If he wants to, he can go. If he doesn’t want to, then you'll allow it as well." Yu Ziyuan let out a sharp laugh, “Then why does A-Cheng have to go no matter what?”

Nie Huaisang stared at the cloth in front of him with a confused frown on his face. "I don't get it."

Jiang Cheng turned to him and asked, "What don't you get?"

Nie Huaisang, "Every one says Jiang-zongzhu favors Wei-xiong right?"

Jiang Cheng scowled in displeasure, "What are you getting at, Nie Huaisang?"

"I was just thinking! If Jiang-zongzhu favored Wei-xiong as much as everyone says… Why would he allow Wei-xiong to go at all if he's not forced to?" Nie Huaisang quickly explained. "I mean, if I favored something, I would refuse to let it out of my sight in case it gets damaged."

That… actually made sense. The cultivators looked at one another and realized if it were them, they wouldn't have let something or someone they treasured go with the knowledge that it would be dangerous. So, did that mean Jiang Fengmian didn't treasure Wei Wuxian like they all believed?

"Jiang-zongzhu is forced to send you because you're an inner disciple and it was directly demanded by the Chief Cultivator. But everyone knows Wei-xiong is only the Head disciple and some even consider him just a servant. Jiang-zongzhu could refuse to allow him to go so he can stay safe at Lotus Pier and it wouldn't have offended the Wens." Nie Huaisang continued speaking, ignoring the cultivators' murmuring behind him. "So by allowing Wei-xiong to willingly choose to go, he's ensuring that you'll be in safe and in good hands because Wei-xiong would never allow for you to be hurt."

Tapping his closed fan into his palm, Nie Huaisang finished his explanation with a satisfied nod and looked away from the cloth to find several pairs of astonished eyes on him. Nie Mingjue raised an eyebrow at his little brother. *'Not so dumb after all.'*

Jiang Fengmian sighed, “San Niang, you seem tired. Why don’t you go and rest?”

“Jiang-zongzhu, what a great man you are! Raising another's kid and spoiling him like this!” Yu Ziyuan snapped.

Jiang Wanyin, “A-Niang.”

"What? What do you want me to do? Do you want me to hold my tongue like your father?" Standing from her seat, Yu Ziyuan glared at her husband and son, “You really are an idiot. How many times have I told you not to hang around inconsequential people? Only God knows what evil they'll do in the future!"

Baoshan Sanren laughed at the audacity of the Jiangs. "The son of Yunmeng Jiang's Right Hand, Wei Changze. Son of Yunmeng Jiang's savior, Cangse Sanren. Grandson of the Immortal Baoshan Sanren. Reduced to the status of a servant that is looked down upon even by the maids. A rumored bastard child. And now, an inconsequential person. What a great person you are, Yu Ziyuan."

Yu Ziyuan paled at her words. The years of resentment towards Cangse Sanren boiled to the surface and pushed aside the life debt owed to the Wei couple when Jiang Fengmian brought home that woman's son. "My husband spent years looking for him after hearing of his parents' deaths. I allowed him to stay at Lotus Pier when he brought him back. That was our repayment to his parents."

The Nies and Lans' frowns deepened at her words. Searching for the boy and allowing him to live in Lotus Pier may be enough to repay Wei Changze for his loyalty to Yunmeng Jiang but it was nowhere near enough to be considered repayment for saving not one but two of their lives as well.

"The depth of your gratitude astounds me, Yu-furen. My mother would be disappointed to learn that the mother of the child her close friend begged her to save would be so ungrateful in the end." Wen-shenyi turned to address Wei Ying as she gave Wei Wuxian a hard look. "Wei Wuxian, you do not owe the Jiangs anything. Especially that woman who calls herself a mother."

"Who are you to speak of my mother in such a way?!?!" Jiang Cheng shot to his feet and screamed at Wen-shenyi.

"Sit down and shut up!" Jiang Wanyin directed at his younger self. "You better than anyone knows that she deserves their disdain. It's better you come to terms with it now and start treating Wei Wuxian like he deserves or you will lose him forever. You still have the chance to change things for the better. Don’t squander it by seeking her approval. She'll never be satisfied."

Wei Wuxian, "Shidi…"

"It's the truth! Even when faced with death, she never said she was proud!" Jiang Wanyin ridiculed. "Even until the very end, she couldn't set aside her pride!"

Color drained from Yu Ziyuan's face as her son's words hit her squarely in the face. His words full of scorn and hatred were directed at her. Gone was the young boy who looked upon her with so much admiration. Gone was her little boy who sought to impress her. All that was left of her sweet and thoughtful boy was a male version of herself.

"You're going to be Yunmeng Jiang's leader one day. But look at you, there's no improvement at all!"

Jiang Wanyin clenched his fists as he glared at the ground. Her words were not new to him but the events leading up to the confrontation added fuel to the already blazing fire.

"I told you long ago you'll never in your whole life be able to surpass the one sitting beside you! Never in cultivation. Never in night-hunting. Not even in shooting kites! You can't surpass him!"

'Don't squander it by seeking her approval. She'll never be satisfied.' His future self's words kept repeating in his mind. She'll always find fault in him whether Wei Wuxian was there or not.

"Vicious as a tigress can be, she never eats her own cubs." Lan Qiren sighed. "Words leave deeper wounds than the sharpest blade. How can a parent hurt their child in such a manner?"

"But It can't be helped. Your mother can't hold a candle to his mother after all. Your mother feels the injustice for you even if you don't. I tell you countless times not to let him distract you yet you still defend him. How could I give birth to a son like you?!?" Yu Ziyuan shot over her shoulder before exiting the dining hall.

'She'll never be satisfied.'

"Again, she brings a dead woman into an argument she herself started." Feng Xin mocked.

"It's almost like she can't go a minute without having to argue about something." Ling Wen agreed.

Jiang Yanli kept her head lowered and continued to peel lotus seeds. Jiang Wanyin fought to keep a tight rein on his temper. Even with his head lowered, Wei Wuxian continued to sneak glances at Jiang Wanyin. *'Jiang Cheng… Why compare yourself to me? I'm no one. Jiang-shushu is only repaying my father's loyalty to Yunmeng Jiang. Why can't they see that?'*

Jiang Cheng raised his head and Jiang Fengmian looked at Wei Ying in shock. "How did you know?"

Wei Ying rubbed the back of his neck and shurgged. "It's easy to see when you look at it from the outside in. Even Nie Huaisang could pick it out by watching us for a few hours."

That is true. Nie Huaisang proved his words correct just moments ago with his analysis of Jiang Fengmian's actions.

After a while, Jiang Fengmian spoke again, "You'll depart together the next day. I will notify the others who will join you."

Not knowing how to converse with his father, Jiang Wanyin simply nodded and waited for Wei Wuxian and Jiang Yanli to finish eating. Wei Wuxian sighed as he observed the father and son duo. *'These two are always like this. No wonder there's so much misunderstanding.'*

"Jiang-shushu, don't you have anything to say to us?"

The Jiangs were once again astonished. Wei Wuxian wasn't seeking Jiang Fengmian's attention for himself. He was trying to build a bridge for them to communicate and bond but they all took it as seeking his attention.

Come to think of it, anytime Wei Wuxian was praised by Jiang Fengmian, he would also bring up Jiang Cheng's accomplishments to divert attention to Jiang Cheng but the father-son duo never progressed more than stilted conversations and awkward silences.

“I’ve said all that needs to be said.” Jiang Fengmian smiled, “Your swords are by your side and the Jiang motto is in your hearts. You’re as ready as you can be.”

‘Is it that hard to tell your son you’re proud of him?’ **Wei Wuxian sighed internally and switched tactics. “Ah! ‘Attempt the Impossible’. Do nothing until you achieve something!”**

A shiver of warning ran up Jiang Wanyin’s spine at the glint in Wei Wuxian’s eyes, “That doesn’t mean that you should knowingly stir up trouble!”

Wei Wuxian stuck his tongue out at him while Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Yanli laughed. The atmosphere in the room was once again light and filled with laughter.

The mood in the hall, however, remained tense. Many were still upset at Yu Ziyuan's words while others were discussing their wrong perception of Jiang Fengmian's partiality to Wei Wuxian.

"Wei Wuxian." Jiang Cheng turned to his Da-shixiong. "Thank you."

Wei Ying looked at his shidi, surprised by his words."Why are you thanking me?"

"For trying to help bridge the gap between A-Die and I. I didn't know about your kind intentions and even misjudged you for it." Jiang Wanyin lowered his head and stared at the floor. A squeeze on his shoulder made him look up to see a smiling Wei Ying. "It's what a Da-shixiong should do."

Morning soon arrived as the Yunmeng Jiang disciples gathered before the docks. Jiang Yanli stood before them handing out packets of food and snacks.n “Here. Take this with you.”

“And this” The disciples looked at each other and laughed as their silly Da-Shijie made her way through the 20 disciples. She always overloads them with food on trips away from Lotus Pier no matter how long they would be gone. “Take this too. Here. Take them all.”

Wei Wuxian laughed and pulled Jiang Yanli to a stop before grabbing the rest of the packs of food from her arms and handing it to another disciple, “Alright, Shijie! That’s enough. It’s going to take us more than 2 years to finish all this.”

Lan Sizhui laughed. "Now I understand where Baba's penchant for packing so much food and snacks for trips come from."

Lan Jingyi's eyes widened. "He always gives us several qiankun bags when we leave for night-hunts and I always thought it was Hanguang-jun who packs it for him!"

Jin Ling huffed, "Jiujiu does the same thing whenever I go to Lotus Pier."

Jiang Fengmian chuckled along with the other disciples. “A-Li, enough. Yunmeng Jiang’s children are not so delicate that they can’t weather the storm outside for a while.”

WIth a final bow, they mounted their swords and headed to Qishan. WIthin the time limit set by Qishan Wen, they arrived at the entrance. Exchanging one final encouraging look, they stepped foot into the Indoctrination Hall.

Chapter End Notes

"Before preparing to improve the world, first look around your own home three times"

translation: Work on improving yourself before trying to improve others.

Lan-xiansheng throwing some shade Madam Yu's way.

A Double-Edged Sword

Chapter Summary

Wen Zhuliu makes an appearance.

The Quintessence of the Wens.

WWZ trolls Wen Chao.

Chapter Notes

This chapter felt... eh. But if I kept writing it would be crazy long (I've already cut it in half and it's still longer than other chapters lol).

Update:
The 4K Kudos follow up oneshot is up!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A sea of different colored robes clustered before stone steps that led to a platform. Wei Wuxian stood next to Jiang Wanyin as he studied the cultivators around him. There was tension in the air as different conversations filtered through. There were no joyful reunions between friends nor were there laughter. Everywhere he looked, Wei Wuxian saw serious faces and displeased grumblings. No one wanted to be there but were forced to be.

Each sect's inner disciple stood among 19 other male disciples. Their Senior robes represented their abilities. Their stances showed that they were tasked with protecting the inner disciples. Lanling Jin, however, was a different story. Around Jin Zixuan were only 5 Junior male disciples and 14 Junior female disciples.

“That is your son! YOUR son! Your legitimate heir!” Killing intent spilled from Liu Rushi in waves as she glared at her husband. If looks could kill, Jin Guangshan would be a skewered roasted pig choking on his own spiddle by now.

“But we shouldn’t be surprised, should we? After everything that we’ve seen… everyone is disposable to him.” Jin Zixuan’s eyes never once left his father. ‘*He’s no father.*’

Jin Guangshan shrugged nonchalantly, “Well, they didn’t mention that the disciples had to be male and senior disciples, did they? It’s not my fault if the rest of the sects think only senior

male disciples can protect their inner disciples."

"Shut up! Stop making excuses for your schemes!" Liu Rushi screamed and turned away from her husband before she murdered him on the spot.

"I can't believe Lanling Jin really sent girls here."

"They didn't even send Senior disciples to assist the sect heir!"

Up on the platform, Wen Chao took a seat and pulled a giggling purple-robed maid into his lap. Behind him and to his right, stood a tall and slim man who stared blankly ahead. Shamelessly, Wen Chao and the maid continued to behave inappropriately in front of everyone.

The elder cultivators frown in displeasure at the improper behavior. It was disrespectful and frowned upon in polite society to behave this way in public.

Lan Qiren shook his head in disgust, "Vulgar."

Wei Wuxian smirks at the memory of their final moments. The atmosphere in the room suddenly shifts and the cultivators' attention focuses on Jiang Wanyin's darkened expression and Wei Wuxian's unsettling smirk. Suddenly, they remembered that it was Wen Chao who threw Wei Wuxian into the Burial Mounds. If they won the war… What happened to Wen Chao?

Wei Wuxian casually leaned on Jiang Wanyin's shoulder and pretended to gag. "Who is that woman?"

"Wang Lingjiao." Someone replied in disgust. "She was Wen Er-furen's maid before she crawled into the master's bed."

"Wen Chao's a degenerate. I don't know how his wife can put up with him!"

"I feel sorry for all the female disciples that were sent here. He'll for sure harass them!"

Accusing eyes once again land on Jin Guangshan. The more the viewings reveal of the Jin Sect Leader's morals and behavior, the more their attitudes towards him shifted to revulsion and cynicism. Will they leave here still being able to at least be socially polite to him?

Wei Wuxian stopped listening to the gossipers as his eyes landed on Lan Wangji and the rest of the Lans. All the Lans looked pale and harried. Although his demeanor was still cold, Lan Wangji's complexion was waxy and pale as he stood apart from the rest of the Lans. *'Something's off with Gusu Lan.'*

Wei Wuxian moved to greet Lan Wangji but was stopped by Jiang Wanyin. "Don't make trouble!"

Knowing what they knew about the events in the Cloud Recesses, it was hard to watch as the Lans struggled to come to terms with what had happened to their home.

Lan Xichen's frown deepened as he took in the state of his younger brother. A lot happened in a short amount of time and it was obvious that his brother was having a tough time digesting it all.

A Wen servant stepped forward on the platform to demand silence and ordered for the Sects to line up before the stone steps.

Wen Chao looked away from the maid and waved his hand to signal the servants. "Since you are in Qishan, you will follow Qishan's rules. First and foremost, in case you disturb His Excellency, no one is allowed to carry weapons. Now… hand in your weapons!"

Gasps and angry shouts fill the hall. To demand a cultivator to hand over their sword was akin to disrespecting their ancestors.

"How dare they?!?!"

"The Wens truly believe they have the power to do anything because Wen Rouhan is the Chief Cultivator!"

"To dishonor a cultivator like this! They've got some guts!"

The sect leaders of the Great Sect share a look. If the war must still happen and the Indoctrination is a part of that, then they will need replica swords made so that it doesn't raise the Wens' suspicions by using practice swords.

“A cultivator always stands with his sword!"

"No way! We will not surrender our swords. I refuse!"

"A cultivator is never without his weapon! Who has ever heard of making cultivators surrender their weapons? How can the Wens be so unscrupulous? I refuse!" A Qinghe Nie disciple bravely stepped forward.

"Well said, Nie Chenliu!" Nie Mingjue praised loudly. The pride shining in his eyes as he watched on caused many to chuckle and shake their heads.

Annoyed at being disturbed by all the shouting, Wen Chao signaled Wen Zhuliu and scowled. “Who just spoke? From which sect? Step forward now!”

Red energy pools into Wen Zhuliu's palm as he dashed forward from the platform. In the blink of an eye, his palm slams into the chest of the Nie disciple who spoke up last. His actions were so sudden that no one could react in time.

"Chenliu-ge!" Nie Huaisang shouted the man's name as if he could reach the illusion with his voice. Horror grips everyone’s hearts as the image changes.

A golden ball of energy flashes on the cloth. Wave upon wave of red energy swirl around the golden ball before piercing it. The golden ball glows brighter and brighter until it cracks and shatters.

The Nie disciple screams in pain and collapses like a puppet that had its strings snapped.

Wei Wuxian took a steadying breath and gave Jiang Wanyin a sad grimace.

Jiang Wanyin shut his eyes tight to stalve off the memories of his own core getting crushed. The overwhelming heat as his core overloaded. The intense pain as it shattered. The utter desolation knowing that you can never cultivate again. His hand unconsciously reached for his lower dantian where Wei Wuxian's core now sat.

Purple eyes sharpened at the motion before shifting to glare at Wei Wuxian in anger. *'Impudent brat!'*

"Wei Wuxian, wait!" Jiang Wanyin goes to grab Wei Wuxian's arm to keep him from dashing forward but is too late. Wei Wuxian drops to the disciple's side to check his condition before stumbling backwards in shock. "His Golden Core... it was crushed."

All eyes shot to Wen Zhuliu in trepidation, "That's Core-Crushing Hand, Wen Zhuliu!"

The hall fell into horrified silence. No one dared to breathe in case it summoned Wen Zhuliu before them.

The Immortal Beings share contemplative looks. A cultivator with the power to destroy Golden Cores had fallen under their radar. This person can't be allowed to become a ranked ghost if he dies. Xie Lian will have to bring this to Hua Cheng's attention.

"That…" Someone stuttered out. "We just watched someone get their Golden Core melted?!?"

"They dared to harm someone from Qinghe Nie and cripple him for life!?!?! I will pay back those Wen-dogs a hundred fold!" Nie Mingjue spit out as his eyes began to turn red.

"DA-GE!" Nie Huaisang and The Head Shaker are instantly pulled away from Nie Mingjue by Wei Ying and Jiang Cheng. Quickly summoning his xiao, *Liebing* , Lan Xichen began to play 'Clarity'.

Blood pounded in his ears as The Head Shaker watched his brother's eyes turn darker red and the signs of Qi deviation showed itself. Color drained from his face and his hands fisted tightly.

Wen-Shenyi darted to Nie Mingjue's side at the same time Wen Qing did. Seeing that Wen Qing was already placing her acupuncture needles, Wen-Shenyi began checking his meridians and carefully transferring spiritual energy.

The music began to calm the Nie Sect Leader as well as calming the minds of the other cultivators. The reactions from the older time travelers to Lan Xichen's playing, however, was alarming.

Zewu-jun and The Head Shaker visibly flinched as if someone had taken a whip to their backs. Jiang Wanyin's arms wrapped around Zewu-jun as he buried his face into his

husband's chest.

Wen Qionglin stood before The Head Shaker and gave his shoulders a hard shake. "Sang-ge, breathe. It's Lan Xichen playing. Sang-ge!! Look!"

Releasing a shaky breath, The Head Shaker focused his attention on Lan Xichen's playing before glaring at Meng Yao. Lan Xichen was not Jin Guangyao. Feeling eyes on him, Meng Yao looked up and was met with The Head Shaker's murderous glare. *'What did I do to make him hate me so much?'*

“Da-ge?” Nie Huaisang’s quivering voice refocused Nie Mingjue’s attention and he gave the younger boy a reassuring nod. When a black jade pendant is pushed in front of him, Nie Mingjue looks up to see Wei Wuxian standing beside Wen-Shenyi and holding the pendant in his hand out to him.

"There are arrays carved into this pendant that helps to draw out excessive resentful energies from the body and balances the Qi so that it doesn't overpower the Golden Core." Wei Wuxian explained, his eyes remained on Nie Mingjue. "Chifeng-zun, you know better than anyone here what your situation is. Address the problem right away or everything that Nie Huaisang has done will still be in vain. You need help, stop being stubborn. Look at your brother. He had to change when he became Sect leader because of your stubbornness. It may seem like he's the same person as the boy that is standing next to him, but he's not."

Nie Mingjue studied Wei Wuxian's face for a moment. When the man returned his gaze unflinching, he got his answer. He knows about the Nies’ secret. Sighing out loud, Nie Mingjue took the pendant and hooked it onto his belt. "You…"

"Yes." Wei Wuxian answered when he trailed off. "I found a way to neutralize Xinglu Ridge using spiritual energy. I'm sure Nie Huaisang has already given his notes to Xiao Huaisang. He's determined to keep you alive for a very long time this time around."

"You… neutralized it?" Nie Mingjue stared at Wei Wuxian with wide unbelieving eyes.

Chuckling, Wei Wuxian turned to head back to his seat along with the others. "They don't call me the Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation for nothing."

Wen Chao smirked, “Disciples like you, who know nothing of conduct, compliance, or humility, are the reason why we are here. To make sure your cores do not go to waste."

"You’re already so ignorant and so audacious. If we don't straighten you out now, in the future, there’ll be those who attempt to challenge authority and climb above their stations!”

Faces darkened as Wen Chao continued to spew out nonsense.

Wei Wuxian returned to his place beside Jiang Wanyin as two Wen disciples carried the injured man away. The two shared a look before Jiang Wanyin whispered, "Stay out of trouble. Don't risk your life for nothing."

"Relax." Wei Wuxian whispered back while staring forward. "I am not going to bring any trouble to Yunmeng Jiang."

"If you can believe his words." Yu Ziyuan mumbled under her breath. It will take more to convince her that Wei Wuxian would never shame Yunmeng Jiang.

Jiang Fengmian frowned at his wife's words. Wei Ying has never done anything to ruin the sect's name. Yes, He's mischievous and gets into trouble but it's nothing more than what boys his age tend to do.

A couple of Wen disciples make their way through the cultivators to collect their swords. Nie Huaisang easily gave up his saber with a final pat and laughs. "Here. Here. You can take it."

Nie Mingjue let out a sigh and shook his head in defeat. *'This boy…'*

"Wait… you have a saber?" Lan Jingyi looked over at The Head Shaker with wide eyes.

The looks on all 4 boys' faces made The Head Shaker chuckle out loud. "Who's to say that I don't still have one? Just because I prefer my fans, doesn't mean I don't know my way around a saber as well."

Seeing that the man had recovered a little from his dilemma, Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes. "Propping up a side of the table can't be considered 'knowing your way around a saber', Sang-di."

The Head Shaker pouted, "Hey! At least it's being used!"

Wei Wuxian watched as Lan Wangji handed over his sword with a blank expression; surprised at his compliancy. Jiang Wanyin clenched his jaw as he clutched his sword once before handing it over. When it was his turn, Wei Wuxian clutched his sword in anger but reluctantly handed it over with a frown after glancing once more at Lan Wangji.

The Wen disciples scoffed at Wei Wuxian and moved to collect the Jins' swords but were ignored by Jin Zixuan. "We, Jins, stand with our swords. If you want our swords, you will have to kill us first."

Shouts of agreement filled the hall as many applauded Jin Zixuan for his bravery. Neglecting that barely moments ago, a disciple had his core crushed as punishment just for speaking out.

Wen Chao sneers from his seat, "You dare to challenge us?"

Jin Zixuan, "Wen Er-gongzi, we are already here for Indoctrination. Do not go too far!"

Wen Chao stands and starts down the steps, "See? This was what I was talking about! Some of you, not just the Gusu Lan Sect, are trying to rebel. Jin Zixuan, are you one of the rebels as well? Take him away!"

One of the female Jin disciples quickly comes forward to stand before Jin Zixuan. “Wen Er-gongzi! Please excuse our gongzi. The Jin clan’s precepts is to always stand with our swords. It's not our intention to offend you.”

Pei Ming raised an eyebrow at the girl's bravery., “Who is that disciple?”

Jin Zixuan, “Luo Qingyang. She’s an outer disciple who joined us from a lesser clan when she was young. She has been training beside me ever since. I'd trust her with my life.”

Liu Rushi frowned at the cloth. Why were none of the male Jin disciples stepping in to protect their sect heir? Luo Qingyang is a capable disciple but she just put a target on herself by stepping forward and her male counterparts just allowed it to happen. *‘Are all the male disciples following their Sect Leader’s example? How long have the females been treated like this?’*

Nie Mingjue shook his head, “She has more bravery in her tiny fingers than the males around her. She just put a target on herself.”

Wei Ying narrowed his eyes, “Whether or not she speaks up, Wen Chao will target her sooner or later.”

“You’re pleasing to the eyes. What’s your name?” Using the hilt of his sword, Wen Chao moves to tilt her face upwards but Jin Zixuan pulls her behind him. Unfazed, Wen Chao’s eyes held an appreciative glint as it roamed over her body. Wang Lingjiao does not miss the action and her face scrunches up with jealousy.

“Wen Er-gongzi, Qishan Wen and Lanling Jin have always been allies. Our Sect Leader instructed us to follow the Wens’ commands before our departure. Please pardon our gongzi.” Luo Qingyang deflected and bowed.

“Fine. For your sake, I will forgive your gongzi this time." Wen Chao sits back in his seat with an arrogant smirk at her words and motions to the Wen disciples. "Take his sword.”

Jin Zixuan grips his sword tighter and glares at the approaching Wens. “Mianmian, no need to beg him for forgiveness. There are no cowards in Lanling Jin.”

Luo Qingyang pulled Jin Zixuan’s sleeve. "Jin-gongzi, have you forgotten our sect leader's instructions? Please don't put Jin-zongzhu in a tough spot and make it harder on us. Just endure it for a little while."

“Of course.” Liu Rushi growls. “Did you think that cooperating with the Wens would spare you? If Wen Rouhan can decimate his own family without hesitation, what makes you think you’ll be walking away pretty as you please?”

Wei Wuxian chuckles, “He knew war was inevitable so he played it safe on both sides.”

Jiang Wanyin, “Even when the Sects banded together to launch the Sunshot Campaign, Jin Guangshan held back. Any efforts made by Lanling Jin in the war was a credit to Jin Zixuan

and his disciples. Even Meng Yao contributed more than him."

"No matter how you dress it, a coward is still a coward." Hua Cheng spoke as he and He Xuan walked through the door.

"San Lang!" Xie Lian smiled from his seat and watched as Hua Cheng handed Wei Wuxian a qiankun pouch.

"A-Die." Wei Wuxian looked inside the pouch but quickly looked back up with a confused look, "This…?"

"I was reminded that there were a couple ghosts that showed up in my Ghost City. It is only fair to let you decide whether or not to release the *inconsequential* ghosts." Hua Cheng replied with a chilling smile.

"I…" Clutching the pouch in his hands, Wei Wuxian looked at Jiang Wanyin. "Perhaps later would be a better time."

Hua Cheng simply nodded and returned to his seat. He Xuan simply scoffed as he walked past the Jiangs to sit down at the table and began eating again. *'This Hua Chengzhu. Why drag me with you to just retrieve some insignificant little ghosts?'*

"Are you gonna surrender your sword or not?" Wen Chao asked lazily from his seat. "I will spare you this time, for the sake of Jin-zongzhu. But if any of you dare to disobey my orders ever again, there will be no mercy."

As the swords were collected, another handful of Wen disciples began to hand out books to each cultivator.

Wen Chao, "Here is a book for everyone. It is a collection of the glorious history and great works of Sect Leaders and famous gentries from the Wen clan. You are to memorize each word by heart. I will have someone recite it every sunrise, midday, and dusk from here on out. Those who cannot recite from memory will be punished according to our family precepts."

Wei Wuxian laughed internally as he read the cover. *'The Quintessence of the Wens'*

Lan Jingyi broke down laughing. "So they accuse Gusu Lan of arrogance because they hold lessons then turn around and emulate them?"

"Except for the whole... being hostages situation." Ouyang Zizhen reminded him.

Jiang Wanyin nudged his side before whispering, "Are you going to read it or not?"

Wei Wuxian smirked, "Of course! I am going to take a hard look to see how touched in the head Qishan Wen can be."

The next morning, the cultivators are once again lined up before the stone steps while reciting from the book. Sweat drips down their faces as the sun continues to bear down

on them. Unable to stand it anymore, Nie Huaisang fainted and fell to the ground before anyone could catch him.

"Huaisang!" Nie Mingjue instinctively shouted. When Nie Huaisang grabbed hold of his sleeve, his mind finally settled when he saw his brother safely at his side. "We need to increase your training. If I have to drag Wei Wuxian to The Unclean Realm to train you, then that's what I am going to do!"

"Da-ge!!!!" Nie Huaisang whined to everyone's amusement.

That night, they are forced to night-hunt, unarmed, against a boar yaoguai. Several fatal near misses later, Wen Chao sauntered up to the tired out and restrained yaoguai to cut off its head.

Time speeds up as daylight fades to night and dawn breaks over the horizon. Each day continues like the one before. Reciting the Wen precepts during the day. Eating stale and moldy food at meals. Acting as meat shields during night-hunting at night.

Shi Qingxuan flipped open his fan and mockingly said, “Looks like your words are coming true, Yu-Furen. Nothing but hostages to abuse and starve.”

Yu Ziyuan seethed in her seat. “Sect Heirs and disciples used as meat shields while he takes the credit!”

Each time Wen Chao opened his mouth, it would be Lan Wangji, Jin Zixuan, or Wei Wuxian who bore the brunt of his insults.

Lan Wangji withdrew within himself and mastered the art of standing meditation. Paying no mind to Wen Chao's insults. This only annoyed Wen Chao as he received no reaction from the Lan.

Jin Zixuan had to be constantly held back or reminded by his fellow disciples to not antagonize Wen Chao for the sake of the Sect. His reactions amused Wen Chao greatly.

Wei Wuxian endured all his insults with a smirk. Occasionally, he would even laugh at Wen Chao's attempts to insult him. Wei Wuxian scoffed at Wen Chao's latest attempt, *'I grew up with Yu-furen's ire. All his insults are child's play compared to her words.'*

Once again, Yu Ziyuan felt glares directed at her but she resolutely kept her eyes on the cloth.

Lan Qiren sighed, “Insults shouldn’t be something a child has to get used to. His behavior makes more and more sense as we go along.”

Lan Xichen nodded in agreement. This was something they never considered when dealing with Wei Wuxian while he was in The Cloud Recesses. They will have to adjust their methods so that it's more effective in helping Wei Wuxian stay on the right path.

Nie Huaisang, “It looks like Wen Chao’s paying extra attention to those who ranked top 4 during the archery competition.”

Wen Qing quickly makes her way towards the Sun Palace through the training fields of the Nightless City. She was summoned post haste.

"Your Excellency! Your Excellency, mercy! mercy! It was my fault! I'll never do it again!"

As she steps through the doors of the main hall, screams could be heard. Closing her eyes, she steadies her heart before taking a deep breath. ***"A-Ning is safe."***

"Your Excellency! Mercy! The resentful energy..."

'I'll treat him in the dungeons… if he survives.' **Wen Qing hardened her heart. Her family's lives depended on her maintaining Wen Rouhan's favor. Otherwise, he'll make an example out of her like he did with her parents. Taking one more big breath, she pushes open the doors to the Fire Palace and the screams increase in volume.**

"He really is already experimenting with resentful energy?" Breathed out Jiang Fengmian.

Wen Qing, "Wen Rouhan has always done as he pleased. To expand the glory of Qishan Wen, he's willing to do anything."

Jin Guangshan smirks, "By minimizing the damage caused by resentful energy, you are enabling him to continue his quest for power, are you not?"

"By catering to Wen Rouhan, *you* are enabling his quest for power, are you not?" Wen Qing retorted. "My only concern is keeping my loved ones alive. If that means I have to heal the devil himself to do it, I will. His actions are not mine. No life has been lost by my hands. Clean hands have no need of washing. Can you say the same, Jin-zongzhu?"

"Who hasn't shed a little blood for greatness?" Jin Guangshan simply shrugged. "Wen-guniang, you think too highly of yourself."

"Yet, she ascended to Godhood while you're rotting away in my cell." Hua Cheng chuckled. "How amazing is your 'greatness', Jin Guangshan."

Jin Guangshan pales when he hears Hua Cheng's words. *'Rotting away in a cell? No… that can't be my end!'*

Wen Ning sits at a side table grinding herbs When Wen Qing returns. Wen Qing begins to pull different herbs from the medicine wall to hide her pale face.

"Jie, I heard that Wen-shushu summoned disciples from each sect to Qishan to be indoctrinated. Do you think Wei-gongzi will be here?"

Ouyang Zizhen nudged his friends. "Anyone else still weirded out to see the Ghost General alive?"

His friends nodded their heads as they looked back and forth between the Ghost General and Wen Ning.

'Interfere in any way and Wen Ning will be next.' **Wen Rouhan's threat was still ringing in her head. Wen Qing stiffened at the mention of the other sects' disciples.**

"A-Ning. We are not the same as Wei Wuxian. I understand that Wei-gongzi was kind to you but with the situation now, we can only thank him in our hearts."

Wen Ning frowned and stopped what he was doing, "But Jie…"

Wen Qing cut her brother off and turned to face him. "We can never be friends with him. Even if he is here in Qishan, you'd better have nothing to do with him and keep your distance."

The image begins to fade away but their voices could still be heard. "But why?"

"It's nothing for you to worry about. Just stay away from him."

"But Jie, Wei-gongzi is a nice person."

"A-Ning! Are you not listening to your sister anymore?!"

"Jie…"

Wei Wuxian chuckled. "Qing-jie! How could you ignore me like that! Come on, your didi is adorable!"

Wen Qing and Wen-shenyi rolled their eyes in sync. Their reaction made both Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian bend over laughing.

Jiang Yanli smiled sadly at their banter. This was the kind of relationship that she had wanted with A-Xian. The kind that her mother had forbidden them to have. He wasn't allowed to call her Jie, just as she couldn't call him didi.

"Well, this is something! I did not expect this to come from the Wens." Wei Wuxian laughed from his bed. ***'The Quintessence of the Wens'*** **held in his hands as he flips through the pages.**

Rolling his eyes, Jiang Wanyin looked up from his seat at the table. "What did it say?"

"Let me read it for you! 'Those who count on their clan and do evil at will, shall all be executed. Not only to be executed, but also decapitated and reviled by the people as a warning to future generations.'" Wei Wuxian laughed again and sat up straight. "If that's the case, decapitated heads would be all over Qishan and outnumber the butcher's pig heads."

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes, "It seems that thick-skin is the Wens' inherited trait."

Wei Wuxian scoffs, "I agree."

"Ning-ge." Lan Sizhui turned to the Ghost General. "Would you know where we can acquire a copy of that book?"

“It’s been so many years…” The Ghost General thought for a moment before turning to his younger self, “Wen Ning, could you write it down for A-Yuan?”

Wen Ning’s shocked expression turns to excitement as he nods with a bright smile. “Mn!”

Wen Chao steps onto the platform and lounges in his seat. Behind him stands Wen Zhuliu with a blank expression. "Well? Boys and girls, have you memorized 'The Quintessence of the Wens'? Do we have a volunteer?"

When no one stepped forward to volunteer, Wen Chao sat up in his seat. "Alright. Since there are no volunteers, I will choose!"

"Wei Wuxian." Said man smirked but did not answer.

"Lan Wangji."

"I cannot." Lan Wangji replied in a cold tone.

Scoffing at the Lan, Wen Chao's demeanor becomes arrogant. "Are you not one of the so-called Twin Jades of Gusu Lan? You can't even memorize a couple lines! You really see our Qishan Wen as insignificant, huh? Fine then, Jin Zixuan, you recite."

Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen narrowed their eyes at the scene.

Lan-xiansheng sighed as he shook his head. So much hatred and senseless violence because of greed and ego. Even when you take out one oppressing force, another pops up. It can be likened to a Jiuying, cut one head but there are still 8 other heads to take its place.

Jin Zixuan turned his head and looked away with his arms crossed. "No, I cannot either"

Wen Chao stands up from his seat with a scowl on his face. "You people-!"

"I will go first! I can do it!" Wei Wuxian quickly hops forward with a goofy smile and hand waving over his head.

“Oh no.” Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes. That smile is the harbinger of mischief and a whole lot of yelling.

Having lost his train of thought when Wei Wuxian interrupted him, Wen Chao's anger subsided slightly and he slumped back into his seat. "Wei Wuxian, you'd better do it right or you'll be punished."

Wei Wuxian steps forward with the book rolled up in his hand. With a glance towards Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji, he raised his arms over his head and began to bend to the left then to the right.

Lowering his arms to his waist, he twists his upper body left and right while lifting the opposite leg. The cultivators lower their heads to hide their smiles.

While the cultivators chuckle at Wei Wuxian's antics, the Jiangs, time travelers, and Immortal Beings let out a resigned sigh and internally grab their foreheads.

"Wei Wuxian!" Wen Chao shouts once he realizes that Wei Wuxian was stalling. "Are you going to recite or not?!?!"

"Yes Yes, I will." Wei Wuxian banters back. "What's the rush, huh? I'll start now. Listen carefully, ok?"

With a smirk on his face, Wei Wuxian walked back and forth in front of the other disciples as he began to recite from memory. Giving off the image of a scholar reciting poetry as he rolled his head in tune with each line recited.

"Do not kill within Cloud Recesses."

"Do not fight without permission."

"Do not commit acts of promiscuity."

"Do not be of two minds."

"Oh my god!" Lan Jingyi pushes out in between laughs. The Quartet have fallen over themselves laughing hard.

"I can't…" Jin Ling huffs out. "Da-jiu… you… oh my god."

"Do not succumb to rage."

"Do not fear the strong."

"This Wei-xiong… really is something." Nie Huaisang didn't know if he should laugh or run away. Snickers ripple through the cultivators. Jin Zixuan turns his head and fights laughter. Lan Wangji remained expressionless but the edges of his lips slightly twitched upwards and amusement shone in his eyes. Jiang Wanyin could only roll his eyes.

"Do not bully the weak."

Lan Qiren looks over at Wei Ying with a contemplative look. He did not expect Wei Wuxian, of all people, to have Gusu Lan's precepts memorized. In his own way, he was standing up for Gusu Lan against all the insults Wen Chao had thrown at them.

"Do not praise yourself and slander others ."

"Do not take advantage of your position to oppress others-"

"Shut up!" Having finally come back to his senses, Wen Chao's face turned red as he slammed his hand on the arm of his seat and screamed. "Wei Wuxian! How dare you recite Gusu Lan's precepts here?!? Do you have a death wish?"

"Hah? Aiya... What a fool!" Wei Wuxian taps his head with the rolled book in feigned shock. "Did I get it wrong? I apologize! I will try again."

"Shut up! Do you think you can make a fool out of me? Disciples, take these three to the vegetable garden…" Wen Chao ordered from his seat with a smirk. "To carry the manure!"

"Hah?!?!? Carry the manure?" The smiles were quickly wiped from Jin Zixuan and Wei Wuxian's faces. Wei Wuxian turned to Lan Wangji, almost pleading. "Lan Zhan…"

Laughter gradually grows louder in the hall.

“Wei-xiong!” Nie Huaisang shouted between gasps of laughter. “You devil! With your terrible memory, I’m surprised you even remember one Gusu Lan rule!”

Smirking, Wei Ying scratches his nose. “I only remember the rules that make sense. Who has time to remember all 3,000 rules? I’m no Lan.”

“Wei Ying is a Lan.” Lan Zhan spoke up. “Tied our wrists with my forehead ribbon. Bowed before Lan Yi. Wei Ying’s grandmother and parents gave permission.”

“LAN ZHHHAAANNNN!!!!”

Chapter End Notes

Jiuying : A deadly Chinese mythical creature of fire and water, with nine heads, and a cry like that of a wailing baby. It is extremely hostile to mankind.

Not A Chapter- Update

I am working to finish the chapters up until the fall of Lotus Pier and then I will upload them relatively close to each other. Please keep an eye out!

Sneaky Peeky:

The image shifts to stone walls lined with torches. Arms reach out to tug on Wei Wuxian's robes as they walk by.

Curious eyes snapped towards Wei Wuxian when his breathing stuttered. Lan Wangji furrowed his eyebrows as he watched his husband's grip on his hand tighten unconsciously. Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Cheng's eyes narrowed at the man's reaction to the scene.

Wei Wuxian walks confidently with a smirk on his face before he's pulled to a stop in front of a steel door. "You've prepared a grand suite for me? How nice!"

Laughing at Wei Wuxian's confident laugh, Wen Chao steps closer with an arrogant look. "There's something unique about this place. You'll see once you go in there."

Wei Wuxian never spoke about what happened when the Wens locked him up that day and the topic was forgotten after they found the cave on Muxi Mountain. Now that they're reminded of it, perhaps they'll now know how he got all his injuries.

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes and took a step towards the cell. *'There's only 1 thing I'm really afraid of. Do your worst-'*

Before he could finish this thought, Wei Wuxian is shoved the rest of the way into the cell. Catching himself before he fell on his face, Wei Wuxian brushed off his robes with a huff.

SNARL

WHAT THE HELL IS THAT!?!?!?

It's A Dog's Life

Chapter Summary

Wen Chao and the vegetable garden has one thing in common.

Clifford, is that you?

This is... not the Cloud Recesses.

Chapter Notes

So there will be several chapter updates with 1-2 days in between. I like to make changes/updates to my upcoming chapters according to reader feedback from the previous chapters to keep the story flowing smoothly and maintain interesting parts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hua Cheng's left eye twitched.

'If that Lan boy thinks it's going to be that easy to marry A-Ying, he's going to be sorely mistaken!' Hua Cheng clenched his fists. A slim fair hand reached out to cover one fist.

Hua Cheng’s anger slowly dissipated as he took in Xie Lian's smiling face. Patting Hua Cheng's hand once more, Xie Lian addressed Ling Wen. "Ling Wen, perhaps we can arrange something while everyone is here?"

Ling Wen observed Lan Zhan and Lan Wangji for a moment before she bowed to the couple and proceeded to enter the communication array. Mu Qing and Feng Xin crossed their arms before their chests as they too observed Lan Wangji and Lan Zhan. It was clear they were sizing up the Lan.

Before they could say a word, the image once again shifted and the viewing continued.

A black robed figure is squatting in a field with his back to the viewers. His body occasionally jerks suggestively.

Wei Wuxian comes into view as he finishes fashioning a scooper out of the materials nearby and stands up from his spot on the ground. With a smile on his face, he runs

towards Lan Wangji to start scooping manure from the bucket before him. “See? Isn't my way better? Lan Zhan, do you want me to make a scooper for you?”

Getting no response from Lan Wangji, who continued to work in the garden, Wei Wuxian leans on his garden hoe and pouts as Jin Zixuan returns with two more buckets of manure. “How come the Lans only have a silencing spell but no smell-blocking spell?”

Jiang Cheng touched his forehead in embarrassment. "Wei Wuxian, could you ever be serious in your life?"

"Yah!" Wei Ying elbowed him in the side and gestured to the sky. "If I'm serious, the sky will collapse."

The Head Shaker shook his head, "Caiyi Town doesn't have enough Emperor's Smile for that."

Jiang Wanyin crossed his arms, "He's a Lan. Let Gusu Lan pay for it this time. Yunmeng Jiang can't afford a serious Wei Wuxian a second time."

Lan-xiansheng, "Half of the cultivation world is still recovering from the last time they forced Wei Wuxian to be serious."

The past cultivators felt a shiver run up their spines as Lan-xiansheng swept his gaze upon them before stopping on Sect Leader Yao. No matter their age, they still remembered their time studying in the Cloud Recesses. The temperature in the hall suddenly dropped as the time travelers grimaced and everyone eyed Wei Wuxian.

Jin Zixuan rolls his eyes and goes to respond when a voice interrupts them.

“I knew you would not be doing your work.”

Wen Chao walks into the garden followed by a handful of disciples. There is a sneer on his face as his eyes land on Wei Wuxian. “What are you whispering about instead of doing the work I assigned you? Speak up.”

“Sure” Wei Wuxian smirks as he stands beside Lan Wangji. “I was just telling Lan Zhan that your vegetable garden smells really familiar. So I was wondering what the smell was. It came to me as soon as you got here.”

Wen Chao’s eyes narrowed as he spit out, “What are you alluding to?”

Stepping closer to Wen Chao, Wei Wuxian took an obvious sniff in his direction and scrunched up his face. “Isn't that smell coming from you as well?”

Laughter filled the hall. Wen Chao was a well-known figure. Although he was the second son of Wen Rouhan, he didn't inherit any of the family's good looks or commendable traits.

His attitude and temperament was also lacking. Who amongst the cultivators haven't had to bite back their true thoughts about him to avoid offending the Wens? Seeing Wei Wuxian constantly agitating Wen Chao felt like vindication.

“YOU! How dare you?!?” Wen Chao’s face turns red with anger and embarrassment. Lan Wangji steps slightly in front of Wei Wuxian when Wen Chao steps forward. Wen Chao raises his arm to bring down the whip in his hand, ready to hit Lan Wangji.

Wei Wuxian yanks the whip from his hand with a snarl and throws it aside. He'll take any punishments dished out to him but he will not stand for others being unfairly punished. Especially Lan Wangji. “Wen Er-gongzi, do not try me!”

Behind the treeline, Wen Ning stood watching the interaction. Worry is written all over his face. A twig snaps behind him, making him spin around in alarm but relaxed when Wen Qing came into view. “Jie!”

Wei Wuxian chuckled. "So that's how you knew to come to the dungeons that day."

Wen Qionglin nodded, "You won in the archery competition. Lan-gongzi, Lan Er-gongzi, and Jin-gongzi also placed in the top 4. Wen Chao would not have just let things go without embarrassing you or worse."

“What are you doing here?” Wen Qing asks as she follows his view path and sees the ongoings on the other side.

“I…” Wen Ning stuttered.

Back on the other side, the Wen disciples quickly move forward with binding ropes to tie up and subdue Wei Wuxian. Wen Chao picked up the whip Wei Wuxian had thrown on the ground and began to whip Wei Wuxian with it.

Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan move as one to stand before Wei Wuxian. Lan Wangji catches the whip in his hand to stop the next whip from hitting Wei Wuxian. Anger radiates off him.

"So handsome!" Wei Wuxian shouted as he grabbed Lan Wangji's arm causing Jiang Wanyin to roll his eyes in disgust.

Wen Chao's face darkens some more. He eyes Lan Wangji's injured leg and smirks before swinging the whip down hard on it. Pain shoots from his leg and Lan Wangji collapses to the ground.

"Wangji!" Lan Xichen's heart pounded in his chest. His brother's injuries were starting to wear thin on him. Lan Qiren took a steadying breath. *'Wei Wuxian is there… he wouldn't let anything happen to Wangji.'*

Although he was frowning at the scene, Lan Sizhui still tried to assure Lan Xichen. "Bofu, don't worry. Baba wouldn't let A-Die get hurt if he can help it."

Jin Zixuan steps forward with a frown, "Wen Chao! You're crossing the line!"

Wen Chao snapped his eyes towards Jin Zixuan as he lifted his hand to signal his disciples to tie up Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan as well.

"Wen Chao!" Wei Wuxian snarled at Wen Chao. "I am the one who offended you. Come at me if you want to."

The Immortal Beings shared worried looks. This habit of pulling anger towards himself to protect others is becoming alarming.

Jin Ling's eyes sparkled as he watched his father stand up to Wen Chao. The stories he was told while growing up paled in comparison to watching him in action! This was way better!

Ouyang Zizhen let out a sigh as he watched, "Even at this stage, Wei-qianbei and Hanguang-jun are protecting each other. How could people think Hanguang-jun hated Wei-qianbei?"

Lan Jingyi, "I feel like everything we thought we knew about these events up until Wei-qianbei's return is going to change yet again."

Lan Sizhui nodded in agreement, "Mn, but will everyone be able to handle it?"

"Aww, I am so scared." Wen Chao mockingly chuckles at their united front. But internally, there's a sliver of fear from Wei Wuxian's angry glare. "Take him into the dungeon."

Lan Wangji shoots back on his feet, ready to defend the Jiang Head Disciple. Wen Chao sneers, "What's the matter? Does Lan Er-gongzi want to join him? Our Wen Sect's dungeons are quite spacious."

Shaking his head to stop Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian chuckles. “Wen Er-gongzi, the dungeon is warm in the winter and cool in the summer. That's most comfortable for me!”

Anger flashed on Wen Chao’s face before it was quickly covered up by a smirk. “Let's see how tough you’ll be when you get there. Take him!”

Lan Xichen stood from his seat to bow towards Wei Wuxian. "Wei-gongzi, thank you for protecting Wangji."

Realizing what Wei Wuxian had just done for him, Jin Zixuan stood to bow as well. "Thank you, Wei-gongzi."

Jiang Cheng clenched his fists and held his words. Wei Wuxian was putting himself into trouble for these two. One he hated and the other hated him. Yet he still... ' *Was he why the Wens targeted Lotus Pier?'*

“Haven't I told you to stay away from them? Stay out of trouble. Let’s go.” Pulling her gaze away from Wei Wuxian’s situation, Wen Qing turned away with a worried frown on her face and left.

“Yes, Jie…” Wen Ning agrees and with one last glance over, he turns to follow his sister.

Wei Wuxian chuckled as he watched his chosen siblings walk away. Wen Qing is all sharp words and prickly personality on top but soft hearted deep inside.

Nie Mingjue laughed at the Wen's behavior, "Wen-guniang seems to have softened towards Wuxian but refuses to acknowledge it."

Wen-shenyi scoffs, "He's like an invasive weed. There's no fighting it. Sometimes it's easier to just give in."

The image shifts to stone walls lined with torches. Arms reach out to tug on Wei Wuxian's robes as they walk by.

Wei Wuxian walks confidently with a smirk on his face before he's pulled to a stop in front of a steel door. "You've prepared a grand suite for me? How nice!"

Laughing at Wei Wuxian's confident laugh, Wen Chao steps closer with an arrogant look. "There's something unique about this place. You'll see once you go in there."

Curious eyes snapped towards Wei Wuxian when his breathing stuttered. Lan Wangji furrowed his eyebrows as he watched his husband's grip on his hand tighten unconsciously. Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Cheng's eyes narrowed at the man's reaction to the scene.

Wei Wuxian never spoke about what happened when the Wens locked him up that day and the topic was forgotten after they found the cave on Dusk-Creek Mountain. Now that they're reminded of it, perhaps they'll now know how he got all his injuries.

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes and took a step towards the cell. *'There's only 1 thing I'm really afraid of. Do your worst-'*

Before he could finish this thought, Wei Wuxian was shoved the rest of the way into the cell. Catching himself before he fell on his face, Wei Wuxian brushed off his robes with a huff.

SNARL

WHAT THE HELL IS THAT!?!?!?

Right before their eyes, Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying's faces drained of color. Cold sweat sprinkled their foreheads while their bodies shuddered involuntarily.

Purple flashed across the scene. A purple robed child was thrown into what looked like a storage room. Sunlight snuck through a single slot in the wall that was barely large enough to stick a hand through.

With his back still towards the viewers, the child stumbled to his feet before lifting his head. Yellow eyes glared at the viewers as sharp canines were bared as the dog snarled menacingly.

SNARL

Jiang Wanyin frowned at the scene as if trying to figure out when this could have happened. Lan Wangji pulled Wei Wuxian into his arms as Jiang Fengmian and Jiang Cheng bolted from their seats. Seeing his older self's actions, Lan Zhan hesitated for a moment before doing the same with Wei Ying.

"No…" Jiang Yanli's right hand flew up to cover her mouth as her left grabbed hold of Jin Zixuan's sleeve.

Only the child's silver eyes could be seen as fear caused them to dilate. The image morphed into the still terrified silver eyes of Wei Wuxian before his head stiffly and cautiously turned to the left.

The eyes of the child and the young man overlap as terror, panic, and desperation battle for dominance in those silver eyes before giving in to unadulterated terror.

"AHHHHHHHHHH!"

"I've never seen Wei Wuxian wear Yunmeng Jiang colors before."

"He looks to be only 8 or 9 here. Wasn't he just brought back to Lotus Pier then?"

"Wait… he was locked up with a dog when he was a child?"

"Is he scared of dogs?!?! How many times did this happen for him to be this terrified of dogs?"

Wei Wuxian shoots back out of the cell and nearly collapses at Wen Chao's feet. His entire body broke out in cold sweats and shook uncontrollably. His eyes no longer focused as terror gripped him tight and paralyzed him.

Watching Wei Wuxian's rapid descent into terror, Wen Chao's smirk grew wider. "Are you scared?"

"Are you scared?"

Yu Ziyuan stiffened as her voice floated through the hall. She could feel the glares directed her way but she resolutely stared at the cloth.

"Wei Wuxian, let me ask you something. If you remain in this room with its occupant, do you think you can make it to sunrise?" Wen Chao sneered before shoving Wei Wuxian back into the cell.

"Do you think you can get out of this room if I don't allow you to?"

The images once again overlapped as the wooden door and metal door simultaneously slammed shut in Wei Wuxian's face. He had run towards the door at full force so he was thrown back from the impact.

Scrambling back to his feet, Wei Wuxian banged on the door of the cell and demanded to be released. The voices of the child and the young man overlapped along with their

images.

"YU-SHENSHEN!!! I PROMISE I WON'T CALL THEM JIEJIE OR DIDI AGAIN! YU-SHENSHEN!!! PLEASE OPEN THE DOOR!!! I WON'T CALL THEN TANGJIE OR TANGDI EITHER!!! YU… YU-FUREN!!!"

"OPEN THE DOOR!!! WEN CHAO!!! OPEN THE DOOR!!!!"

"San-niang?" Jiang Fengmian turned to his wife in horror only for the woman to refuse to look him in the eye. How could this happen under his roof? How did he not hear the poor boy's screams?

"She locked him up because of that?!?!"

"If they adopted him, why couldn't he call them Jiejie and Didi?"

"While I understand her situation, this… you can't treat a child like this!!!"

Laughter floated to him through the door as Wen Chao spoke, "Wei Wuxian, if you can survive the night, then I will let you off."

"Once I release you, you will tell Jiang Fengmian that you will not wear Yunmeng Jiang colors anymore."

Wen Chao, "If you die here, well… then you have no one to blame but yourself. Be a good boy and just stay here. Enjoy the night with your new friend!"

"You have no one to blame but yourself. If you survive the night, learn your place and never call my children your siblings again. You are beneath them."

"WEN CHAO!!! OPEN THE DOOR!!!"

"YU-FUREN!!! PLEASE OPEN THE DOOR!!! I PROMISE NEVER TO WEAR YUNMENG JIANG COLORS AGAIN!!! PLEASE OPEN THE DOOR!!! I PROMISE!!!"

"This… this was why you stopped calling me Jiejie after I came back from the Discussion Conference that year?" Jiang Yanli asked with tears in her eyes.

"Shijie.. " A lump formed in Wei Ying's throat, stopping him from speaking.

"I should have known something was wrong when you refused to wear Yunmeng Jiang colors." Jiang Cheng glared at the cloth before him.

"The sudden request for black and red robes right after my return from a discussion conference should have been a red flag but I ignored it." Fengmian closed his eyes and shook his head in shame. "Although it started out as a lie to keep me from asking further questions, you truly honored your parents by wearing their colors all these years."

"That's why he wears black and red robes?!?!"

"Hah? And all this time I thought he was refusing to wear Yunmeng Jiang colors due to his arrogance. Looks like we were all wrong about him."

Jiang Wanyin clenched his fists. All these years… these were a point of contention between the two brothers. Wei Wuxian's refusal to wear Yunmeng Jiang colors and his stubborn clinging to only addressing them as Shijie and Shidi. "The next time you stay at Lotus Pier, you better wear the Yunmeng robes I had made for you or I'll ban you from drinking!"

"A-Cheng-" Wei Wuxian tried to refuse but was cut off by Jiang Wanyin.

"I am the Sect Leader of Yunmeng Jiang now. Only my words are law." Jiang Wanyin spoke but quickly amended when Zewu-jun discretely coughed. "Mine and Zewu-jun's words are the only ones that you need to follow."

Jiang Cheng stared at his future self in horror while Wei Ying and Nie Huaisang fought not to laugh. Nie Mingjue raised an eyebrow towards Lan Xichen causing the man to blush and look away. Lan Xichen's heart felt a little warmer as he thought about the interaction between Jiang Wanyin and Zewu-jun. It's not a bad feeling to get used to.

Wen Chao's laughter began to fade as he walked away before a whistle pierced through Wei Wuxian's yelling.

Frozen in place, Wei Wuxian slowly turned from the door and pressed himself flat against the wall.

Hot breaths blew into his face as the beast stepped closer to Wei Wuxian. All color drained from his face and his hands gripped the wall so tight that his fingertips turned white. The wall that his entire body was pressed against was the only reason he remained standing. Wei Wuxian began to violently shake.

SNARL

"Shi-..."

"Jia-…"

"Lan..."

A large black muzzle with sharp canines bared in a snarl came into view as the monster shot forward to bite at its prey. Wei Wuxian instinctively threw his arms up to cover his head and the monster's jaw clamped down on his right arm.

"SHIJIE!!!! SAVE ME!!!"

Lan Jingyi, "Holy Shit!"

"Ji-Jingyi!" Lan Sizhui reprimanded his friend but it came out in a stutter as fear gripped him.

Jiang Yanli gasped before Jin Zixuan instinctively pulled her against his chest and blocked her view of the cloth.

Wei Wuxian is slammed against the wall with a flick of the canine's head. He scrambled up from the ground to unsteadily stumble to the furthest corner away, where the canine couldn't reach.

Before he made it to sanctuary though, a large paw slashed at his chest and knocked him back into the wall with a loud crack. Slumped down on the ground, Wei Wuxian remained motionless.

Biting the arm closest to it, which happened to be the same bitten arm, the canine flicked his head once again and threw Wei Wuxian against the opposite wall. His body slid to the ground and his right arm gushed out blood from the wounds inflicted by the bites.

The cultivators watched in horror as Wei Wuxian was thrown about like a rag doll. No one noticed the Wen Chao Daruma doll violently being thrown around on the ground. Hua Cheng looked over at the doll before kicking it roughly against the wall.

The canine snarled and slowly made its way towards Wei Wuxian with its teeth bared.

'I'm sorry, Lan Zhan. I promise I won't make you hate me so much in our next lifetime.'

"I'm here, Wei Ying. Won't let this happen, I promise." Lan Zhan spoke softly into Wei Ying's hair. His arms held onto Wei Wuxian tighter as he shivered.

Jin Guangshan swept a calculating glance between Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying. If dogs can reduce them to this state, it would be easier to control the boy than he thought. Lanling has no shortage of dogs. Liu Rushi narrowed her eyes on her husband. The glint in his eyes spelled trouble for Lanling Jin.

Out of strength and still gripped by terror, Wei Wuxian simply closed his eyes and braced himself.

The canine collapsed with a thud before it came close to Wei Wuxian. When nothing happened, Wei Wuxian opened his eyes to see the canine on the ground before him. Three needles poking out from its neck.

"Wei-gongzi!"

"Wen Qionglin?!?!?!"

"He…knows how to use needles too?" Nie Huaisang asked worriedly.

"Looks like Wen Qionglin's instincts were indeed correct." Nie Mingjue complimented.

Wen Ning blushed red at the compliment before shyly replying, "W-Wei-gongzi was kind t-to me during the a-archery competition. Kindness s-should always be r-repaid."

Nodding in agreement, Nie Mingjue continued the internal argument with himself. *'Wen Qionglin and Wen Qing obviously are being threatened to ensure their cooperation. But Wen Rouhan is obviously planning something yet they still did not seek asylum elsewhere.'*

Looking towards the door where the voice came from, Wei Wuxian wondered if he was hallucinating.

"Wei-gongzi!"

Realizing there was actually someone on the other side of the door, Wei Wuxian dragged himself over to the door and slid down it to sit on the ground near the metal bars. "Who are you?"

"I-It's me, W-Wen Ning. W-Wen Qionglin. We… We met at the Archery competition."

"Oh… it's you! Why are you here?" Grimacing as his arm throbbed in pain, Wei Wuxian hugged his bleeding arm to his body. Using his teeth to remove the bracers from his sleeves, he tightly wrapped it around his injured arm to stem the bleeding.

Wen-shenyi frowned at the sight of Wei Wuxian's injuries. "He covered up his injuries quite well while you looked for the cave. I should have paid more attention to it."

Jiang Wanyin was also frowning, "We got a glimpse of his injuries but they didn't look this bad at the time."

The Head Shaker sighed and spoke softly, "He used the night hunt and events in the cave to distract us from it."

Lan Wangji's grip on his husband's hand tightened slightly. "He gained more injuries in the cave."

"Aiyah, Lan Zhan! We all came out of there safe and sound! That's all that matters!" Wei Wuxian awkwardly chuckled as he patted Lan Wangji's hand. He Xuan and the rest raised their eyebrows at Wei Wuxian. It seems downplaying his injuries was a long ago learned trait.

"Wei-gongzi, h-how are your wounds? I b-brought you some m-medicine. This is a n-natural energy booster. It can h-help you to stabilize your energy a-and enhance your core." Wen Ning slips the ceramic bottle through the bars for Wei Wuxian to grab.

"The h-herbs in this pouch can help s-stop bleeding. You c-can't ingest it."

Grabbing both the Booster and the pouch of herbs, Wei Wuxian quickly downs the energy Booster but puts away the herb pouch. *'Let's save these herbs for Lan Zhan."*

Jiang Cheng's frown deepened. "Lan Wangji! Lan Wangji! Can't you think of the situation you're in?!?!"

"A-Cheng." Jiang Yanli gently reprimanded.

Jiang Cheng, "A-Jie! He's already hurt like this but all he can think about is Lan Wangji!"

Jiang Yanli, "A-Xian cares about Lan Er-gongzi so he will think about him. He would do the same for you or I."

Nodding their agreement, the female cultivators' impression of Jiang Yanli improved. Her temperament offsets her low cultivation. Liu Rushi smiled at the thought of her future daughter-in-law.

"Wen-xiong, thank you!" Wei Wuxian spoke through the bars.

"Wei-gongzi, there's n-no need to thank me! I'm terribly s-sorry for everything they've d-done to you all, especially with what happened to t-the Cloud Recesses." Wen Ning replied from the other side with his head lowered.

Alarmed by Wen Ning's words, Wei Wuxian sat up from the door. "What happened to the Cloud Recesses?"

"Did you not k-know? Wen X-Xu was dispatched to the Cloud R-Recesses by Wen-zongzhu. When he got back, h-he announced that he had c-cleaned house for the Lans. That the p-place had been r-renewed by the fires of Qishan." Wen Ning's voice became softer and softer as he spoke. A sadness in his eyes because of the actions of his sect. "A-A nirvana for hundreds of y-years is ruined just like that."

Anger flashed in Wei Wuxian's eyes before it opened wide with realization, "Lan Zhan... his injuries?"

"Lan Er-gongzi had his leg broken by Wen Xu."

The Lans' faces darkened at the reminder of what had happened to their home.

"Sizhui! We have to write down all the wards Senior Wei helped improve so that they can set it up when they get back!" Lan Jingyi nudged Lan Sizhui.

Lan Sizhui gave his childhood friend a look. "Jingyi… you're the expert arrays and talismans out of the four of us."

Lan Jingyi scratched the back of his head and chuckled while pulling utensils from his qiankun pouch. "Right… right.. I'll start writing it down."

"That is outrageous!" Wei Wuxian slammed his fist on the ground.

"Wei-gongzi! Please c-calm down. Be mindful of y-your wounds!" Wen Ning pleaded through the bars. "I can't s-stay long. Please take care!"

"Wen-xiong, no words can express my gratitude. Take care, yourself!" Wei Wuxian replied with a smile and listened as Wen Ning's footsteps faded away.

Pulling himself into the corner furthest away from the canine, in case it woke before the needles were removed, Wei Wuxian promptly fell asleep with his legs pulled up to his chest in the corner.

"Wen-xiong! You're amazing!" Wei Ying shouted from beside Lan Zhan who gave Wen Ning a nod as well. Wen Ning blushed even more at the constant compliments directed his way.

"This is not worth mentioning compared to what Ying-gege did for the Dafan Wens." If fierce corpses could blush, Wen Qionglin would be just as red.

"A-Ning…"

The cloth rippled before the image of Wei Wuxian is replaced with a small child dressed in rags huddled in the same position against an alley wall. Before him are three straw dolls laying on the snowy ground. The child lifted his head to look at the dolls before reaching for the two bigger ones.

"A-Die. A-Niang. A-Ying has been a good boy! So come back soon!"

The sounds of a rattle drum drew his attention away from the dolls. As he looked up, a rattle drum was pushed into his field of vision.

A soft voice floated to his ear, "For you."

His eyes stared at the toy for a moment before they continued upwards to white robes with light blue cloud motifs. Jade token hung from a belt. Straight black hair fluttered in the wind. Red lips tinted slightly blue from the cold.

At last, silver met gold.

"That was you!?!?!" Wei Wuxian and Wei Ying shouted at the same time.

Wei Ying excitedly turned to Lan Zhan and grabbed his sleeve. "Lan Zhan!!! I still have that rattle drum in my room! Something kept telling me to keep it safe and look! It's because it's the first gift to me!"

Wei Wuxian smiled sadly as his husband upon the reminder of where he had left the rattle drum. "Lan Zhan… the rattle drum mmmm."

Lan Wangji quickly gave Wei Wuxian a kiss on the lips to stop his words. "I'll buy you a new one when we return. As many as you want."

Lan Xichen chuckled at his brothers' expressions. "It seems you and Wei-gongzi are fated to meet no matter what, Wangji."

"Mn." Lan Zhan nodded before his eyes gravitated towards Wei Ying again. *'What would have happened if I asked Shufu to bring Wei Ying back with us then?'*

"Wei Wuxian… Are you still breathing?"

Wei Wuxian woke up with a start at the sound of Wen Chao's voice. The clanking of metal can be heard from his sword being dragged across the metal bars of each cell as he walks leisurely towards Wei Wuxian's cell. "How many legs are left?"

Dashing from his spot on the floor, Wei Wuxian quickly removed the needles from the canine's neck and hid it in his robes. Just as he returned to his spot in the corner, his cell door swung open and Wen Chao sauntered in.

Before him was a beaten but still very alive and intact Wei Wuxian. With a snarl, Wen Chao smacks the now awake canine's spout in anger. "Can't even take the meat that's within reach. Did we feed you too full? Useless beast."

"Wen Chao." Wei Wuxian gripped his arm as he spoke. "Letting a beast fight your fight, what a hero. If you have the guts, you can fight me one-on-one."

"Today is your lucky day." Wen Chao glared at the boy in black robes before turning to leave. "We have plenty of time to play. Drag him out."

"Is that him?" Asked He Xuan as he pointed to the Daruma doll rolling around by the wall.

Hua Cheng. "Yes."

He Xuan, "Can I feed him to my fish?"

Hua Cheng simply averted his eyes and continued watching.

"Jie! You're back!" Wen Nin called out from where he was grinding medicine.

After several moments of silence, Wen Ning looked up and quietly spoke, "Jie… have you seen Wei-gongzi and the others? How are they?"

"A-Ning, why bring them up again? Have my words fallen on deaf ears?" Wen Qing paused as she weighed the herbs before her. "Let me ask you, where did the natural energy booster in my dispensary disappear to?"

Wen Ning lowered his head in guilt but remained silent. Seeing this, Wen Qing continued to scold him. "You weren't in your room last night. Where did you go? Do you seriously think I am clueless about what's going on around me? If you do not behave, you will no longer be allowed to leave this room."

"Busted!" Nie Huaisang and Wei Ying laughed.

Wen Qing simply rolled her eyes. Once Wen Ning's mind is set on something, no amount of threats can change his mind. Unless it came to Wei Wuxian from what she observed so far.

"Jie... weren't you the one who taught me that our Wens' principles teaches us to always pay back kindness?" Wen Ning quietly asked. "Wei-gongzi… he defended me in front of everyone and I made him lose face but he still remained kind. I owe it to him."

Stepping before her brother with a sigh, Wen Qing placed her hands on his shoulder, "A-Ning, you are all I have left in our family. We are in a precarious position with Wen-shushu. Especially now that he's tampering with resentful energies. I can't lose you too. Do you understand?"

"Why not seek asylum at another sect?" Nie Mingjue pondered out loud.

"Simply the surname Wen is reviled or feared. If we sought asylum, would you trust or even believe us? Would Wen Rouhan just let us go without repercussions? My parents were executed simply for not following his orders not to save a life." Wen Qing stated blankly.

"Although we never shed any blood or took any lives, we were still deemed equally guilty by the cultivation world because our surname was Wen. 'Inaction is just as culpable' were your exact words when condemning us, Nie-zongzhu." Wen-shenyi spoke up.

Their words stopped Nie Mingjue short. He and the rest fell into silent contemplation. Did their hatred for the Wens spiral so out of control that they condemned innocents as well?

Rows of disciples lined up once again before the stone steps of the Indoctrination Platform. Nie Huaisang and Jiang Wanyin share uneasy glances in between glancing around for Wei Wuxian. Although his face remained blank and cold, Lan Wangji's eyes flashed with concern at the Head Disciple's absence.

The announcement of Wen Chao's arrival pulled everyone's attention back to the platform. Two Wens marched Wei Wuxian to the front where his sect stood.

"Wei Wuxian!"

Shock crossed everyone's faces as they took in his state. Although there was a smile on his face, his reddened eyes and ashen face told a different story.

"Good morning, everyone!" Wei Wuxian shouted as he took his place between Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji.

Lan Jingyi shook his head. "Wei-qianbei is really good at pretending things are alright."

Ouyang Zizhen nodded his agreement. "This is why Hanguang-jun and Sizhui pay extra attention to him."

Taking in his Da-shixiong's state and how he was cradling his arm, concern quickly replaced Jiang Wanyin's shock. "What happened? What did they do to you?"

Jiang Wanyin's question drew Lan Wangji's attention and he frowned when Wei Wuxian hid his arm. "This is something you do not understand! These are my glorious-" hissing in pain as his movements pulled at his wounds. "...my glorious battle saga. What? Miss me already?"

"Mnn! A man must have a few battle scars to prove that he once lived!"

"Exactly! Pain is temporary but the scar left behind is your glory!"

"What pain? What scars? You cry if the paper accidentally cuts your finger!"

"Shut up! You can't just say things like that out loud!"

"You wish!" Huffed Jiang Wanyin. "I think you haven't had enough. You have not learned your lesson."

"Oh no… A place like that? Once is more than enough for me!" Wei Wuxian quickly rebuffs.

In an effort to change the subject, Wei Wuxian looked over to Nie Huaisang. "Nie-xiong, do you have anything to eat? Something like osmanthus cake or a custard bun? I was locked in that damned place all day without food. I'm starving!"

At the mention of food, items began to appear on the table in front as if summoned by the viewing itself.

"Osmanthus cake? You must be dreaming." Nie Huaisang looked incredulous at the question "You think we are still guest disciples attending the lectures at Gusu Lan?"

The disciples' faces darkened at the reminder of their current situation. Some would give anything for the bitter soups of the Cloud Recesses right this moment.

Jiang Wanyin pulled something from his sleeve and unwrapped it after making sure the Wens weren't looking. "There's no osmanthus cake but a steamed bun. You'll have to

make do."

A heaviness settled in the hall as Jiang Wanyin’s words settled in their hearts. No matter how much they complained about the food at the Cloud Recesses, they never went hungry nor were forced to eat rotten foods. Even on the worst days, they were allowed to go to Caiyi Town to dine. This was too much.

"Let’s take a break here." Xie Lian announced. "We should settle our minds so we can continue on with the viewing with clear minds."

"I have a feeling it's only going to get worse." Baoshan Sanren finally commented.

Chapter End Notes

Yuanxiao - a sweet rice ball.

Next update: Mon/Tues

Top Shelf Quintessence of the Wens

Chapter Summary

Wen Chao being his groady self.

Wangxian dog food for all.

Lan Zhan, the King of Jealousy.

Chapter Notes

Life happens when you're the least ready.

I can't express how thankful I am for every one of you guys! Thank you for sticking it out with me all these months!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Forgotten against the wall, the Wen Chao Daruma doll began to violently shake. The loud noise drew the attention of those in the room. Red smoke appeared in a sudden flash. Horrified gasps filled the hall as a bloody and broken figure was revealed once the smoke cleared.

"What…?!?!?!"

"What the hell?!?!?"

"Is it human?!?!?"

"Wh-What happened to him?"

"I'm going to be sick…"

"That…that was the Wen Chao doll, wasn't it? I-Is that… Wen… Wen Chao?" Stuttered Nie Huaisang as he hid behind Nie Mingjue. Aside from Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin, no one knew the final state Wen Chao ended up in. Even the older future cultivators were shocked at the man's state. Everyone knew that Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin had taken their revenge for the fall of Lotus Pier but the Lans never looked further into the matter as it did not pertain to them.

The incoherent ghost continued to cower and shiver as wet gurgling sounds came from his throat. Broken and mangled fingers reached upwards to pull at the few remaining strands of hair on its bent head. The ghost remained unaware of its surroundings until it finally lifted its head. Only to come face to face with smirking silver eyes.

Wei Wuxian's smirk deepened as he slowly tilted his head to the side and his eyes flashed red. Everyone watched as pure unadulterated fear consumed Wen Chao. An ear-piercing squeal ripped through the hall. Wen Chao threw himself on the ground before Wei Ying's feet.

Slamming his forehead against the ground in repeated kowtows, only gurgling sounds could be heard from Wen Chao. It wasn't until Wen Chao lifted his face fully that the cultivators realized that the bottom half of his face was missing. Causing Lan Jingy to hastily retreat behind Lan Sizhui and Jin Ling to step closer to Ouyang Zizhen. Those with a weak constitution turned away and fought the urge to vomit. What in the world happened to him?

'One step out of line, I will show you exactly how I avenged my shidis and shimeis when I hunted down Wen Chao.'

Fearful gazes fell upon a still smirking Wei Wuxian as his voice echoed in their heads. All thoughts of food flew from their minds. Although they've seen bits and pieces of what Wen Chao had done to Wei Wuxian and knew he deserved retribution, the state that the ghost before them was in terrified them to the bone.

"Exactly what did he do to end up in this state?" A minor Sect Leader ventured to ask. Several murmurs of agreement followed his question though no one expected an answer. No one dared. They've all spent a decent amount of time watching both the younger and the older Wei Wuxian so it was safe to say they've gotten a basic idea of his tolerance levels. Wen Chao had to have hurt someone important to Wei Wuxian and received his retribution.

"I came across this ghost in Chongyang while searching for fragments of A-Ying's soul." Hua Cheng spoke from his seat. With a satisfied scoff, he sized up the ghost. "The slightest sounds terrified him. I had more important things to do than watch over him so I locked him up in a cell."

Zewu-jun glanced at his husband before venturing a guess. "Chongyang was where Yunmeng Jiang set up their base after the fall of Lotus Pier. Wen Chao led his men to attack the stronghold even though they were being tormented by an unknown force."

A certain former Jin Sect Leader felt dread pierce his heart. This… this was going to be his fate as well if he pushed too far. This was what happened when one hurt the loved ones of the Yiling Laozu.

'No… Now everyone can see the demon he'll become. A few well placed words and rumors and they'll no longer believe his words or the people who came with him.' Jin Guangshan laughed in his heart. He just needs to wait until everyone realizes what a monster the Wei boy really is and he can seize his powers back.

"Shall we continue with the viewing then?" Seeing how everyone no longer wanted to move from their seats, Baoshan Sanren sighed. With one last look at Wen Chao, everyone turned

their attention back to the cloth in front.

Wen Chao strutted up onto the platform and plopped into his seat. Wen Zhuliu stood behind him to his right and Wen Qing to his left. Her eyes subtly checked over Wei Wuxian to make sure his injuries were not too severe.

"Before we begin, there are a few… announcements." Wen Chao smirks at Lan Wangji from his seat. "First, the Cloud Recesses is now under Qishan's control."

Lan Qiren narrowed his eyes. His mind was still plagued with the image of his home burning. "Wangji, was the Cloud Recesses recovered after the war?"

"The Wens left a few disciples there to watch over the Cloud Recesses. Wangji and the remaining uninjured seniors retook the Cloud Recesses after Wangji returned from the Indoctrination."

Lan Qiren hummed in acknowledgement as he stroked his beard. "Well done, Wangji."

"Secondly, Qinghe Nie was insubordinate to our instructions. Their lack of discipline led to His Excellency to order a crackdown." Wen Chao sneered with a provoking glance at Nie Huaisang.

Nie Huaisang paled and stumbled backwards. "Da-ge! What happened to my Da-ge!?!?"

"Insubordinate." Nie Mingjue laughed. "What a fancy word for standing our ground when unjustly attacked."

Lan-xiansheng shook his head. "They have used more absurd reasons to annex sects before. We never once objected which led to all of this."

Meng Yao secretly watched the Nie brothers from his seat. The former Nie Sect Leader was rumored to be murdered by Wen Rouhan. It wouldn't take much for the Wens to rile up the Nies. Once they reacted, the Wens could easily claim insubordination. Meng Yao slowly began to understand Wen Rouhan's thought process. The man was a true strategist so what went wrong?

"A hot-head trying to put up a desperate fight, what do you expect to happen?" Wen Chao laughed. "Then, there is Lanling Jin…"

"Wen Chao, I dare you!!" Jin Zixuan fisted his hands to keep himself from running up the platform to punch Wen Chao.

Jin Zixuan and Liu Rushi clenched their fists and glared at Wen Chao on the cloth. What nonsense reason did they give to attack Lanling?

"Jin-gongzi, allow me to finish. Lanling Jin has been cooperative. So long as you don't stir up trouble here, your parents will remain safe."

Having been calmed down by Wen Chao's words, Jin Zixuan took a step back and reluctantly acquiesced. As long as the Sect is safe, there is still a chance to get back the upper hand.

Jin Guangshan smirked. Of course they would be fine. Qishan Wen and Lanling Jins had an agreement. *'Lanling would be safe so long as we don't fight Qishan head on. I'm not stupid enough to join a losing fight.'*

"Don't be too happy just yet, Jin Guangshan." Nie Mingjue spit out at the smug look on the man's face. "The fact that Lanlin Jin was even a part of the campaign should already tell you that Wen Rouhan had set his sights on you whether it was before or after you joined our side."

Nie Mingjue's words caused Jin Guangshan's face to collapse. His heart dropped with the realization. The Head Shaker chuckled behind his fan. "Even though they joined the campaign, it was just for show. It was obvious you were leaving yourself a way out in case things went one way or the other."

Jiang Wanyin, "If the Wens won, you could argue that you were coerced but didn't contribute much to the efforts. If we won, you're acknowledged to have sent disciples to fight. It was Jin Zixuan who fought wholeheartedly and went against your orders to retreat."

The Head Shaker, "Even the decimated Yunmeng Jiang Sect had a stronger showing than Lanling Jin before Wei-xiong's return."

Wen Chao smirked again as he looked down on the waste of air posing as cultivators before him. His eyes leisurely landed on Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian. "As for Yunmeng Jiang… It is a shame that Jiang Fengmian is such a coward to hide away in Yumeng."

"Wen Chao!" Shouted Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian. Their faces distorted in anger but held themselves back from attacking the bastard.

"You better grin and bear it! I'm chomping at the bit to pay a visit to Lotus Pier in person." Wen Chao laughed.

Nie Huaisang, "Then… with the Wens making absurd excuses to attack sects… wouldn't that mean they used Wei-xiong as an excuse? That it really wasn't his fault?"

Wen Qionglin, "They would have still used him as a reason to attack whether Ying-gege offended them or not. They knew his… status… at Yunmeng Jiang."

Several eyes flickered to Yu Ziyuan. Who needed a reason when Wei Wuxian's name alone could easily rile up the lady of the house? How many times had she blamed him for things that were out of his control in the time span that they have been here?

Ouyang Zizhen, "I'm starting to see how Wei-qianbei's reputation deteriorated so badly."

Lan Jingyi, "Poor Wei-qianbei."

"Wen Er-gongzi. We have news about the beast at Dusk-Creek Mountain." A Wen disciple reported. Wen Chao's smirk grew deeper as he eyed the cultivators while listening to the report. *'We have perfect meat shields right here.'*

The image tilted towards the sky as the scenery changed to mountainous terrains.

"Spread out and look carefully!"

"The cave is nearby! If you delay Wen Er-gongzi's night hunt, you'll regret it!" Wang Lingjiao swung a metal branding rod around as she barked out orders.

Disgusted groans filled the hall.

"This maid thinks too highly of herself."

"Ahahaha her cultivation is so low that she can only wield a branding iron!"

Standing by the river, Wei Wuxian looked back from his spot between Jiang Wanyin and Nie Huaisang. His attention was once again on Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian continued to observe Lan Wangji as he slowly made his way past the other cultivators. Sweat dotted his eyebrows with each step he took.

Knowing that Jiang Wanyin would stop him from going to Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian thought to sneak away while he was distracted but a hand reached out to pull him back by the collar.

The cultivators chuckled at the boy's aggrieved look. The Heavenly Gods shared amused looks as it reminded them of the times A-Ying tried to sneak out to play pranks.

"A-Ying, I'm beginning to believe your luck is just that bad." Laughed Shi Qingxuan.

Wei Wuxian pouted and crossed his arms. "No way! I am the king of stealth!"

Jiang Cheng, "You were caught everytime you sneaked out to buy Emperor's Smile."

Wei Ying, "That's because Lan Zhan was always on patrol!"

Nie Huaisang, "You were always caught when passing notes in class."

Wei Ying, "That's because I sat behind Lan Zhan!"

The Head Shaker, "When you released all the bunnies in the backhill?"

Jiang Wanyin, "Everytime you and Huaisang sneaked away to the back hills?"

"Because… Lan Zhan…." Wei Ying sheepishly scratched his nose and stopped responding as the others laughed harder.

"So if we want A-Ying to not cause too much trouble, we should let Lan Wangji discipline him?" Pei Su nodded his head as if he just discovered something groundbreaking.

"We'll have to trouble A-Zhan in the future then." Xie Lian chuckled while Hua Cheng narrowed his eyes.

The future cultivators remained quiet and all glanced at Wei Wuxian, causing him to grimace and hide behind Lan Wangji's arm.

'Discipline…?'

'What discipline!?!?!?'

'Who dares to discipline the Yiling Laozu!?!??!'

'Not to mention that ancestor! Hanguang-jun…'

'Hanguang-jun was the one allowing him to break all those rules!'

“What are you trying to do now? Don’t be so reckless and provoke Lan Wangji! Did you already forget what happened the last time you tried to help him?!?!”

“I’m not going to provoke him. He’s been walking on his injured leg for days now! If we can clearly see pain on his face, it’s obvious that his injury has gotten worse! If this keeps up, he’ll never be able to use that leg again. I’m going to carry him the rest of the way.” Wei Wuxian threw off Jiang Wanyin’s grip.

Lan Xichen's heart twisted painfully at the sight of his little brother's stiff and pained body. How many days was he forced to walk with that broken leg?

"Wasn't he dragged to Qishan from Gusu on foot?" Wen Qing studied the image before her. "If treated in time, there wouldn't be any cause for concern. Rest would have been the best for his recovery though I doubt Wen Chao would allow them to rest."

Wen-shenyi, "The herbs in A-Ning's pouch helped counter any detrimental side effects."

“You’re not that close to him!” Jiang Wanyin pulled him back before he could run off, “Have you forgotten how much he hates you? Carry him? He probably doesn’t want you anywhere near him.”

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes, “If he hates me, that’s fine. I don’t hate him. The second I get a hold on him, I’ll throw him on my back. He couldn’t possibly choke me to death while on my back, could he?"

Lan Zhan's eyes widened at how determined Wei Ying was to help relieve him of his pain. His heart warmed as he looked at the younger boy with a soft look.

Lan Jingyi's face twitched, "Wei-qianbei… he…"

Jin Ling scoffed as he shot a disdainful look at the younger version of his Da-jiu. "Could you even carry Hanguang-jun for any length of time with those scrawny arms?"

"Yah! Who are you looking down on you little brat!?!?!" Wei Ying shot to his feet and propped his arms on his hips.

"Hanguang-jun lifted you up with one hand. ONE HAND!!! Does he really need your weak self to carry him?" Jin Ling shot back while Lan Sizhui tugged at his sleeve with his head lowered. Jin Ling felt a cold glare and followed it to find Lan Zhan glaring at him.

Jan Wangji, "Jin Ling. 5 more times."

"Y-yes… Hanguang-jun."

Irritation welled up in Jiang Wanyin’s heart as he warned again, “We can’t even take care of ourselves! Where can we find time to take care of others’ trivial matters?!?!?”

“First of all, this is no longer 'others' trivial matters'.” Wei Wuxian threw off Jiang Wanyin’s grip on his wrist once again and began walking towards Lan Wangji before throwing a look over his shoulder. “Secondly, *someone* must do something about the situation.”

Feng Xin, "You call yourselves Senior and Elder cultivators but not one of you is as insightful as a 15 year old child."

"He is correct in his conclusion." Lan Qiren nodded his head in agreement. Loathe as he was to agree with Wei Wuxian, the boy was more aware of his moral obligation than others. "One often meets his destiny on the road he takes to avoid it. By trying to avoid it, we've cornered ourselves."

Limping to a nearby rock to temporarily rest his injured leg, Lan Wangji internally reflected as his eyes gazed around his surroundings. *'The trees prefer calm, but the wind does not stop.'*

“Lan Zhan!”

The familiar voice floated towards Lan Wangji. His eyes flickered with emotion for a moment before it hardened and he pushed off the rock to continue to walk.

"Lan Zhan! Wait for me!" Wei Wuxian cut Lan Wangji off before he could walk further. "Lan Zhan! Aren't we already close? How could you be so cold to not even give me a single look? Hey! Is your leg really ok?"

Lan Wangji's heart stuttered at his words and he quickly turned his head to avoid looking at Wei Wuxian, "We're not close."

"Lan Er-gege!" Wei Wuxian pouted coquettishly. "Look how mean you are to your Xianxian!"

'Wei Wuxian… could you please not forcibly feed us dog food?'

Lan Wangji, "Mn. We are close."

'Nevermind. As you please…'

Wei Wuxian took a deep breath and opened his mouth as if he was about to say something but his attention was diverted by a pleasant smell. His eyes brightened when he found the source of his distraction.

Noticing the younger boy's eyes had brightened, Lan Wangji was temporarily frozen by the sight. Pulling himself together, Lan Wangji followed Wei Wuxian's line of sight to a group of female cultivators.

"Wei Wuxian's fourth on the list of most outstanding bachelors. Who hasn't heard that he likes to flirt with the ladies. I'm surprised he ended up with Lan Wangji." A brave cultivator spoke up. His friends frantically tried to shush him from the side in hopes of preventing him from offending the Lans. His words caused Lan Zhan's face to darken.

"Lan…Lan Zhan! It's not…it's not like that!" Wei Ying stuttered. How could he explain in a way that wouldn't make Lan Zhan even more angry?

"Mianmian! Your perfume sachets are truly special! The bugs stopped coming for me after I wore it! It also smells amazing that I feel more awake after smelling it!"

"The sachet is filled with medicinal plants and can come in handy in a lot of ways." The Jin disciple explained before turning to the girls at her side. "I still have a few here. Do you girls want one too?"

Jin Zixuan pulled out the sachet he had received from Luo Qingyang and hurriedly gave it to Jiang Yanli. "Here! It's really effective and smells nice. You should wear it."

Fellow female cultivators internally slapped their foreheads and shook their heads collectively. *'Jin-gongzi… Jiang Yanli knows how to make her own sachets. Shouldn't you be asking her to make you one instead?'*

Liu Rushi could only question her son's intelligence in her heart. How is Jin Ling going to be born sooner if her son continues on like this?!?!

"Mianmian! Save one for me too!" Wei Wuxian popped up out of nowhere like a foreboding gust of wind and scared the female cultivators, causing them to squeak in freight.

Luo Qingyang scrunched her face in confusion at being addressed so intimately by someone unfamiliar, “Who are you? Who gave you permission to call me Mianmian?”

Wei Wuxian grinned and scratched his cheek, “All of them call you Mianmian, so I thought that was your name. Is it not?”

Lan Wangji's eyes narrowed. The boy had only just seconds ago tried to talk to him. His eyes turned cold once again as he watched the exchange.

Jiang Wanyin, however, rolled his eyes when he witnessed his shixiong's usual shamelessness. It was a common occurrence for him to be suddenly left behind by Wei Wuxian like this. But seeing Lan Wangji being momentarily left behind gave him an odd sense of… satisfaction? *'Hah! Even the peerless Lan Wangji doesn't stand a chance against Wei Wuxian's attention span!'*

Jin Ling's face muscles twitched. *'So Jiujiu has been petty towards Hanguang-jun since then.'*

The Head Shaker, "When he's focused on something, you can't even tear him away for days at a time. But when he's not, no one can keep his attention for long."

Jiang Wanyin, "Not unless their name is Lan Wangji or Lan Sizhui."

Luo Qingyang blushed and stuttered, “You… you can’t call me that!”

Wei Wuxian's smile turned slightly mischievous, “Why not? How about this... why don’t you tell me your name? Then I won’t call you Mianmian anymore.”

"Why do I have to tell you just because you asked?" Luo Qingyang veered her eyes away from the boy's smiling face with a pout, “Before you ask for somebody else’s name, shouldn’t you introduce yourself first?”

"Sure, if you want my name." Wei Wuxian spoke after a pause with a wide cheeky grin on his face, “Remember! My name is….‘Yuandao’.”

'Yuandao?' Luo Qingyang* mentally repeated the name. *'Yuandao? I don’t recall any Young Masters with that name. The way he carries himself and his aura isn't that of a normal disciple though.'

"Play on words." A deep voice spoke behind them.

Turning to look at Lan Wangji, Luo Qingyang suddenly realized what Wei Wuxian meant with a gasp. “Who’s yearning for you?!?! Shameless!!!”

Xie Lian chuckled at Wei Wuxian's playful play on words. "How endless is my longing for the distant road."

"As expected of my A-Ying!" Pei Ming laughed out loud.

Lan Zhan's face darkened even further, causing Wei Ying to panic yet again. "Lan Zhan! I… no, he was trying to get a sachet of herbs from her!"

Lan Zhan, "Ridiculous."

The girls around her collapsed into a laughing mess after coming to the same conclusion.

“Wei Wuxian, you really are ridiculous!”

“I’ve never seen someone as annoying as you!”

“Let me tell you! Her name is...”

Luo Qingyang began to drag the girls away and turned to leave, “Go... let’s go! You can’t tell him my name!”

"You can go but at least give me a sachet, won’t you?!" Wei Wuxian shouted from behind them, “You’re ignoring me? You don’t want to? I’ll find others and ask for your name. There must be someone out there who’s willing to tell me…”

A perfume sachet flew over and landed right in the middle of his chest. Wei Wuxian exaggerated as though his heart hurt with a loud "OUCH". A hand rubbing at his chest as he spun the sachet around his finger. *'One of the herbs in here should be able to help Lan Zhan's leg.'*

The uncomfortable feeling in Lan Zhan's chest eased at the boy's thought. It really was just for the sachet and it was for his sake.

Wen-shenyi shook her head and rolled her eyes. "Wei Wuxian, why can't you just ask for things like normal people?"

"That's boring!" Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian answered together, eliciting more chuckles.

"Heh?" Lan Jingyi leaned over to whisper to Lan Sizhui, "Sizhui... why does that sachet look so familiar?"

"Er..." How should one respond? That was Hanguang-jun's coin purse...

"What? Why are you looking at me like that? Where were we again?" Noticing Lan Wangji’s cold expression as he walked back to his side with the pouch spinning around his finger, Wei Wuxian’s grin slipped slightly before he snapped his free fingers and bent down to offer his back, “Oh, right! How about I carry you on my back?”

Quietly watching Wei Wuxian for a moment before Lan Wangji couldn’t help but ask, “Do you behave so frivolously with everyone?” *'Am I not different from the others?'*

Confused about Lan Wangji's change of mood, Wei Wuxian tapped his chin as he replied, “I think so?”

"Idiot." Both Jiang Wanyin and Wen-shenyi muttered out loud.

The answer made Lan Wangji's heart drop and he looked at the ground. A moment later he turned to leave and spat out through gritted teeth, “Audacious!”

'His leg…'

Lan Wangji walked faster without bothering to give Wei Wuxian even a glare. Wei Wuxian's smile slipped once again. "Fine, fine! You don't have to walk so fast! I'll go."

With furrowed eyebrows, Wei Wuxian quickly caught up to Jiang Wanyin, who had an ugly expression on his face. Wei Wuxian's eyes still occasionally drifted to Lan Wangji, however.

“You’re so ridiculous!” Jiang Wanyin had an ugly look on his face as he spoke sourly, “You still have the time to pay attention to him? Why don’t you pay attention to yourself!?! Who knows what tricks that idiot, Wen Chao, is planning while making us search for some cave entrance here at Dusk-Creek Mountain. I wouldn’t be surprised if he uses us as meat shields again.”

Jiang Wanyin's words pulled everyone's focus back to the real situation in the viewing. The sect's heirs and inner disciples were being held hostage and were even being used as meat shields for the Wen brat.

Against the wall, Wen Chao whimpered for a moment before trying to make himself as small as possible.

“Please don't do this, Wen Er-gongzi.” Her shaky soft voice from behind the bushes caught the attention of Wei Wuxian’s group.

“Don't do what? Don't hold your hands?” The boys’ faces darkened as Wen Chao’s grating voice rang out.

The scene suddenly shifted to Luo Qingyang being roughly thrown to the ground. She quickly recovered her senses and shuffled backwards to try and get away from the man before her. Wen Chao loomed over Luo Qingyang and pinched the distraught girl’s chin roughly. “...Or don't kiss your pretty face?”

Every face in the hall darkened as the scene played out. Indignation flared in the female cultivators when the male cultivators on the cloth simply stood aside and did nothing. They first glared at the men before directing their anger towards the trembling Wen Chao.

"Disgusting!"

"He's arrogant enough to force himself on a woman with so many people nearby?!?!"

Jin Zixuan's face darkened further. Even though Luo Qingyang wasn't an inner disciple, she was still a close friend who trained alongside him.

“Hold on!”

Wei Wuxian sidled up next to Wen Chao. Wrapping an arm around Wen Chao’s shoulder, he nimbly pulled the man away from the girl and spoke in a conspiring manner. “It's not very satisfying to use force, right?”

Wen Chao’s face showed his impatience and displeasure as being interrupted. “You-”

"What?"

"Wei Wuxian… you…"

Confusion swept through the viewers as they tried to comprehend what Wei Wuxian was trying to do.

“Aiya… What's the rush? Wen Er-gongzi, I've got something even better. The best erotic portraits.” Pasting an ingratiating smile on his face, Wei Wuxian quickly turned Wen Chao around.

Putting himself between the man and his prey as he reached into his robes to pull out a book. The title of the book is hidden from view.

Not a single sound was made as silence fell in the hall.

'Erotic portraits!?!?'

'Why would he be carrying around erotic portraits?!?!'

Wen Chao’s face instantly showed interest at the sight of the thick book. However, before Wen Chao could grab the book, Wang Lingjiao’s voice cut through the forest.

“Wen Er-gongzi!” Wang Lingjiao’s ample bosom bounced as she ran towards them, making several cultivators avert their eyes in disgust. Hatred and jealousy flashed in her eyes once it landed on Luo Qingyang. She quickly grabbed and rubbed herself against his left arm coquettishly. “I've found the cave!”

“Where is it? Take me there right away!” Everything is forgotten as Wen Chao instantly pushed Wei Wuxian away from him before rushing off with Wang Lingjiao.

Liu Rushi, "This maid…"

Wen Qing, "She followed Chu Fang'er to Qishan as her dowry maid last year."

"Then she climbed into bed with her mistress' husband." Liu Rushi sent a glare towards Jin Guangshan. She was no longer surprised when faced with such situations.

“Wei-xiong! Where did you get the erotic portraits-” Fellow female cultivators rushed to help Luo Qingyang up from the ground as Nie Huaisang approached Wei Wuxian. The image followed Nie Huaisang’s dumbfounded gaze to the book’s title.

The Quintessence of Wens.

Nie Mingjue burst out in hearty laughter alongside the viewers. He roughly slapped Wei Wuxian's shoulder. "Wangji! You must allow Wuxian to come spend some time at the Unclean Realm. No, Wuxian, you need to swear brotherhood with Huaisang right away so Gusu Lan can't occupy all of your time!"

"Mingjue, you…" Smiling helplessly at his childhood friend, Lan Xichen could only shake his head. "Perhaps after the wedding?"

"Alright!" Nie Mingjue belted out.

'Erm… isn't anyone going to ask the person in question?" Wei Ying sulked internally. Lan Zhan's lips curved upwards at the mention of their future wedding.

Footsteps echoed against the walls of the cave as the room darkened. The cultivators carefully walked two in a row across a strip of land as Wen disciples rushed them from behind. Their steps occasionally loosened rocks and pebbles causing them to fall down the steep sides of the path. Towards the middle of the group, Jiang Wanyin walked beside Nie Huaisang while Wei Wuxian stuck to Lan Wangji's side.

Behind them, Luo Qingyang walked beside Jin Zixuan as they made their way forward. The ground below her right foot loosened and a scream was ripped from her throat as her body pitched to the side. Jin Zixuan instinctively reached out and grabbed her arm to prevent her from tumbling down.

Wen Chao sneered. "What's the hold up? Why are you screaming? If you disturb the beast, are you going to take responsibility?"

Unable to hold his anger any longer, Jin Zixuan spoke coldly. “You dragged us here saying that we’re hunting a beast. Then, if I may ask, what sort of a beast is it? If you inform us ahead of time then that will help us cooperate more efficiently and with less confusion than last time.”

“Inform you?” Wen Chao sneered as he shoved his way towards Jin Zixuan. “Maybe I haven't made myself clear. You serve me. I’m the only one who gives the orders. I'm the only one who directs the battle and commands the disciples. I don’t need your suggestions. I am also the *only one* who will conquer the beast!”

"He deliberately led them into danger without even allowing them to properly prepare!"

"They’re not even concerned with giving an answer to the Sects if something happened!"

"To blindly charge into such a dangerous location…" Jiang Fengmian furrowed his eyebrows in contemplation. "The Wens would simply say that everyone met with an accident while they were night-hunting. With two of the Great Sects already fallen to them, would the other sects be able to even seek compensation?"

Wang Lingjiao scolded from where she stood in the back, “Didn’t you hear what Wen Er-gongzi said? Get down there! Quickly!”

Peeking over the steep slope to his right, Wei Wuxian exchanged a look with Jiang Wanyin. Wen Chao moved to stand behind Wei Wuxian as the boy spoke up, "It seems to be bottomless. Not knowing what beast we're hunting nor did you make anything clear to us, how exactly are we going to get down-"

Alarm crossed Lan Wanji, Jiang Wanyin, and Nie Huaisang’s face as Wen Chao raised his leg and kicked Wei Wuxian from the back with a smirk on his face. The boy quickly disappeared down into the darkness.

"WEI YING!"

"WEI WUXIAN!"

Chapter End Notes

"The trees prefer calm, but the wind does not stop."
In spite of your wish for peace, trouble is brewing. Things will develop regardless and you are powerless to influence the outcome.

"One often meets his destiny on the road he takes to avoid it."
Though the quote is from Jean de La Fontaine, I imagined Lan Qiren speaking it in Master Oogway's tone.

Son of a... turtle?

Chapter Summary

Please keep in mind that while I base a lot of the viewings on the various MDSZ medias, I am also adding scenes that I created to add more background to the story.

This is an extra long chapter to thank you for your continued support!

Madam Yu being herself. Pissing people off... you know.

Land or Turtle?

Hualian's starting to get suspicious...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cultivators quickly dodged out of the way as Wen Chao is thrown backwards towards the back of the room. Due to the array keeping everything confined in the space, his transparent body is slammed against the back wall and drops to the ground with a loud thud.

Pulling his gaze from Wen Chao's collapsed form, Nie Huaisang's lips twitched as he gaped at the screen. "How many times have we seen Wei-xiong get pushed off from high up?"

"His face just makes you want to kick his ass off a cliff." Jiang Cheng tisked at the screen. His words were crass but the well-hidden worry in his eyes was not missed by someone. Zewu-jun only smiled knowingly at his husband's blushing younger self.

Lan Jingyi, "Erm… I think we should ban Wei-qianbei from high places."

Ouyang Zizhen, "... he does have a tendency to… "fall" from high places."

Chuckling at the boys' hushed Whispers, Xie Lian shook his head. They've all lost track of the amount of times they each had to catch A-Ying before he smashed his head open. Seems the boy is just prone to injuries. Intentional or otherwise.

Loose pebbles and rocks scattered as a person barrelled towards the viewers. A small body dressed in stained and dirty purple robes slammed against a boulder. A dull thud

sounded as the arms protecting the child's head and their chest connected with the boulder before the momentum ricocheted his body backwards onto his back.

The image goes in and out of focus as they view through Wei Ying's eyes. The child stiffly turns his head to look up to the top of the hill where a dark lavender-clad woman stood. Pure disgust written plainly on her face. "First Disciple should have been given to Jiang Cheng."

Yu Ziyuan is thrown from her seat and slammed against the back wall. A loud cracking of bones sounded through the hall before Yu Ziyuan landed next to Wen Chao. Her breathing coming out in gasps from her cracked ribs.

The cultivators' eyes unconsciously quickly flickered towards Yu Ziyuan before turning back to the screen. Unsure how to react in this situation. *'Again? Just how much did Yu-furen mistreat the kid?'*

Unease once again settled in Jiang Fengmian's heart. It was becoming quite clear to him how much Wei Wuxian had suffered in his home at the hands of his wife. All he can do now is close his eyes to brace himself for what's to come.

***'...shouldn't… have… accepted…'* The child's thoughts echoed through the hall, tinged with a sense of helplessness.**

"... Everything was… to protect… Jiang Cheng… when he's… Sect Leader." Wei Ying struggled to pull air into his lungs and gasped between words.

The image darkened at the edges and a scoff was faintly heard before Yu Ziyuan turned away and left without a backward glance.

Xie Lian suddenly appeared before Yu Ziyuan and pulled her up by the collar. "Because your *husband* made A-Ying the First Disciple instead of your son, you decided to take your frustration out on A-Ying?!?!"

Hua Cheng, "How is it? How does it feel to be at the end of your own ruthlessness? Isn't this how much force you used when you kicked A-Ying down? What? Can't handle it? It's just a few broken ribs."

Although the Jiangs and Liu Rushi wanted to help Yu Ziyuan, one look at the Immortal Beings' faces made them stay where they stood. This was not going to be a good conversation as it was Yu Ziyuan who was in the wrong.

"Sect Heirs have always… been the First Disciple." Yu Ziyuan gasped out. Her face slowly turned purple from a lack of oxygen from Xie Lian's strangle hold. "If Jiang Fengmian wasn't playing favorites… it would have been Jiang Cheng!"

"Is the title of Sect Heir not lofty enough for you?" Pei Ming eyed Jiang Cheng from where he sat. "Does your son deserve the title of First Disciple?"

"I'm not impressed with the young man." Mu Qing spoke with his arms crossed over his chest. "There's improvement in his older self, however."

"That's because she wasn't around." The Head Shaker spoke from behind his fan. His eyes glinted with disgust as he stared at the Jiang Sect leaders.

Jiang Yanli worriedly looked at her mother before turning to check on her brothers. Jiang Cheng's face was darkened with resentment whereas Wei Ying's face was drained of all color.

"The First Disciple title goes to the one who embodies the Sect's values and understands the core of its teachings." Lan Qiren sighed. Having known Jiang Fengmian for so long, he understood the man's character. He would not have made Wei Wuxian the First Disciple if he truly did not deserve it.

"Baba…" Wei Wuxian called out to Xie Lian as Yu Ziyuan's face became tinted with more blue and purple. "She's already in pain from the array, why don't you let her go?"

Xie Lian's grip loosened and Yu Ziyuan dropped heavily to the ground. Her whole body trembled from the pain in her ribs as she struggled to pull in air. After a moment, she lifted her head to glare at Wei Ying. "Jiang Fengmian hadn't played favorites and spent more time training you instead of Jiang Cheng. Jiang Cheng is the Sect Heir! He should be the First Disciple!"

"Do you really think it would make a difference if you were the First Disciple?" Jiang Wanyin looked at his mother's hatred-tinged expression as he asked his younger self.

Jiang Cheng, "I…"

"It took me decades without Wei Wuxian to realize that sometimes it really is… just a title. I never realized everything he secretly did for us. From including us in every training to making sure that A-Die's attention was redirected to us." Jiang Wanyin's gaze landed on Wei Ying. "Though he carries the title of First Disciple, our training was identical. Our responsibilities were meant for a future Sect Leader while his were for the future Right Hand Man."

"Is that what your father told you?" Yu Ziyuan laughed. "Who has ever heard of the Sect Heir not being the First Disciple!?!?! It's a disgrace! It tells the world that our heir isn't capable enough to surpass a servant's son! Wei Wuxian has made our Sect a laughingstock in the cultivation world!"

"Bullshit! Huaisang is Qinghe Nie's Sect Heir but he also isn't the First Disciple." Nie Mingjue spoke from his seat.

"He's a dandy and an embarrassment to Qinghe Nie! He doesn't even wield a saber!" Yu Ziyuan spat out. "He's only the Sect Heir until you have your own children. He does not count!"

"Good for you, Yu Ziyuan!!!" Nie Mingjue bellowed. The hall plunged into silence as the faces of the Nies and the future cultivators darkened at her words. *Baxia* rattled in its sheath. Nie Mingjue's eyes narrowed on the woman on the ground as his hands tightened into fists. Lan Xichen quickly drew his xiao and began playing.

"A disappointment?" Wei Wuxian's eyes flashed red as he slowly stood from his seat. "Yu-furen, with Nie Huaisang's brain and abilities… you won't even know how you died if he wanted you dead. Why do you think that out of all the sects who suffered after the Sunshot Campaign and the Jin manipulations, Qinghe Nie was the one that remains prosperous? If he is a disappointment, no one would dare to call themselves a treasure."

Lan Wangji, "Huaisang is a force. Even without a saber."

"Yu Ziyuan seems quite tired to me." Baoshan Sanren suddenly spoke to the room. Her eyes were full of disdain for the Jiang leader. Her words made Yu Ziyuan freeze.

Zewu-jun looked over to where Yu Ziyuan sat on the ground before smiling at Jiang Fengmian. "Indeed she does, Jiang-zongzhu."

Lan-xiansheng looked at each Jiangs' face before letting out a sigh."Jiang-zongzhu, perhaps it's time for Yu-furen to take a rest from her sect duties?"

The Jiangs' faces lost all color as one after another, all the cultivators agreed with Lan-xiansheng's suggestion for Yu Ziyuan's "rest". If it was just a few voices of concern, they could still brush it off. But the entire cultivation world in this room is calling for her removal from power… not doing so would trigger catastrophic consequences. All they can do now is get Yu Ziyuan back into her seat and think of a plan later.

As everyone was contemplating the Jiangs' response, Jiang Fengmian's voice projected from the screen.

Jiang Fengmian, "When I look at you and A-Cheng, I see myself and A-Ze. He was my voice of reason. My anchor. I should have listened to him and fixed my relationship with your shumu before things got out of hand. I shouldn't have let your parents leave without clearing things up. It shouldn't have turned out like this. Now all of our children are paying for our failures. A-Cheng will only have you to fall back on when he becomes Sect Leader."

Wei Ying, "But Shijie…"

"A-Li…" Jiang Fengmian sighs, "A-Li loves with all her heart. But that love is single-minded and she will lose focus on everything else. She will be married one day and then have her own family's interests to protect. The First Disciple… it must be you, A-Xian. You must be A-Cheng's compass when I am no longer here. You have to protect him, A-Xian."

"A married daughter is like spilled water, aish."

"Wait… so Wei Changze tried to help them fix their relationship?"

"If they were as close as he says, why did he leave the sect after marrying Cangse Sanren?"

"Probably forced to leave by *someone* . It may have all started with his parents back then."

"Aiya… To take antiques for junk and sell them."

"Too true!"

Jiang Wanyin thought back to the days after Jiang Yanli got married. Although Lotus Pier was almost fully renovated and the Sect recruited new disciples, Jiang Yanli almost never returned back home for a visit. In each instance that they saw each other, it was he who went to her. His father's words turned out to be exactly how it happened. Without Wei Wuxian, he was truly left alone to spiral into the Abyss.

"This pair of husband and wife…" Feng Xin shook his head. "One is dissatisfied with A-Ying being made First Disciple over her son whereas the other uses A-Ying as a crutch for the same son. And you claim he shows A-Ying favoritism? Isn't it the other way around?"

Mu Qing, "Why waste your breath? They'll only see what they want to see."

The cloth rippled as the disembodied voices faded away. Wei Wuxian's back slammed against a large boulder. His injured arms just barely cushioned the back of his head against the impact.

Taking a moment for the pain and dizziness to subside, Wei Wuxian painstakingly lowered his injured arms and slowly sat up.

More loose pebbles came tumbling down and Wei Wuxian turned his head towards the noise to find white robes gliding down thick vines before landing on solid ground and quickly rushing over.

"Of course Hanguang-jun would be the first to reach Wei-qianbei!" Ouyang Zizhen chuckled.

"Where there is A-Xian, Wangji is not too far behind." Zewu-jun teased with a laugh.

Lan Wangji, "Are you OK?"

Lan Wangji helped gently pull Wei Wuxian off the ground, taking care to not agitate his wounds. More pebbles and rocks were displaced as Jiang Wanyin and the rest climbed

down the vines one by one. Wei Wuxian brushed dust and dirt off his robes and chuckled, "Were you kicked down too?"

"Get Lost!" Jiang Wanyin retorted with a scowl. "We were worried you would embarrass Yunmeng Jiang by being swallowed up by the monster."

"Hey! Did you find anything unusual?" Wen Chao's nasally voice came from above.

Golden robes in Wei Wuxian's peripheral vision caught his attention as he rolled his eyes. Jin Zixuan stood slightly behind Jiang Wanyin as he looked around the cave in disgust. Wei Wuxian looked at him in skepticism. "These two aside, you weren't also worried that I got swallowed up, were you?"

Jin Zixuan rolled his eyes and looked away. "I'd rather come down and take my chances with the beast than stay up there listening to that couple insult us."

A few laughed lightheartedly at Wei Wuxian's reaction. These two truly are always at odds with each other, even in trying times.

Wen Chao's voice came from above once again, "Yah! Are you all dead already?"

"Understood." Wei Wuxian nodded in agreement with Jin Zixuan. After a short discussion, the boys all decided to follow the sounds of dripping water further inside the cave. Wen Chao and his goons were completely ignored.

"What's going on? If anyone is still alive, you better answer me immediately otherwise you'll regret it when I get my hands on you!" Wen Chao shouted one last time down the steep slope before commanding his disciples to descend before mounting his sword with Wang Lingjiao in his arms.

Wen Zhuliu mounted his sword and turned to find Wen Qing frowning while looking down the slope. At his call, she once again becomes expressionless before switching her sword to her right hand and mounting his sword behind him.

"This Wen Zhuliu seems like a smart fellow. Why is he following Wen Chao around?" Nie Mingjue furrowed his eyebrows in thought.

Yu Ziyuan, "Zhao Zhuliu's abilities set him apart from others and he was often ostracized at the Zhao Sect."

Jiang Wanyin's face darkened as he remembered the night Wei Wuxian interrogated the man. "He said he owed Wen Rouhan his gratitude."

"Did he say what for?" Lan Qiren inquired only to receive a negative response.

Deeper into the cave, disciples of all sects are scattered around. Surrounding them and blocking the exit were Wen disciples armed with swords and torches. Although they remained vigilant, everyone was beginning to get antsy.

"What kind of beast are we supposed to be hunting? We've stood here for so long but it's just a dead end!"

"It's been two hours!"

Wei Wuxian walked up to the pool of water that was large enough to be considered a lake. A large islet stood in its dark murky water.

Losing his patience, Wen Chao cursed under his breath before his face brightened and a sinister smile spread. *'Beasts crave blood.'*

"This doesn't bode well…" Lan Sizhui whispered to his friends who only nodded in response. Their eyes locked on the screen in anticipation for the great battle against the Xuanwu of Slaughter!

Wen Chao, "String someone up and let out some blood to lure the beast out."

Wen Qing remained expressionless, however, her eyes flashed in alarm.

With a smirk, Wang Lingjiao was going to use this to get rid of the competition. Wang Lingjiao's eyes immediately darted to Luo Qingyang and pointed towards her. "How about her?"

"Mianmian?"

"Somebody do something… Mianmian!"

Blood drained from Mianmian's face and her mind went blank. Fellow female cultivators looked from one male cultivator to the next, too scared to speak up themselves.

"This damned maid!"

"Aiyah… look how vindictive that woman is!"

"Ugly… too ugly…"

The female cultivators shook with anger as the male cultivators continued to discuss. No one was going to step up and protect the poor girl! This was the fate of all the females in this

world. If they don't protect themselves, no one will. If they do fight back and get stronger, they're labeled as "too fierce" and "too unladylike".

"They're really not going to protect her?" Jiang Yanli asked out loud. Her eyes were already glistening with tears as she thought of herself being in that situation. Her brothers would protect her without hesitation but this poor girl had no one there.

Jin Zixuan wanted to assure her that the other Jin disciples would step up and protect her but after everything he had seen, he wasn't confident that would be the case anymore.

"Hah? This… this one? Ahmm… why don't we pick someone else?" Wen Chao was a bit reluctant. He hasn't had a taste of the beauty yet.

"Why?" Wang Lingjiao rubbed herself against his arm and spoke coquettishly. "Don't tell me you'll miss her?"

Eyes glued to the ample bosom rubbing against his arm, Wen Chao's face flushed red with excitement and he spoke distractedly. "Non… nonsense! Do whatever you want! Everything is up to my Jiaojiao!"

"Hurry up and catch her! Kill anyone who dares to shield her!" Wen Chao shouted to his disciples when they hadn't moved to capture the girl.

Jiang Wanyin held Wei Wuxian back when his body twitched to move forward. Mianmian ran to hide behind Su She, who happened to be the nearest cultivator, however, he quickly stepped away at Wen Chao's threat.

Wen Chao laughed as he watched cultivator after cultivator step further and further away from the girl in fear of retaliation.

Finally seeing that she had no other choice, Mianmian ran and hid behind Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan as they stood side by side.

"A jealous bitch and a disgusting swine. They're well-made for each other!"

"To be led by the balls like him… I wouldn't want to be a man anymore!"

"Shameful!"

Lan Jingyi rolled his eyes at Su She. "One should learn how a Lan should act from Hanguang-jun. "

Su She's hatred for the Lans doubled as he glared at the unknown Lan. Who does he think he is? "Ha! The other Gusu Lan disciples didn't help her either! You all speak as though he's infallible! Let's see how upstanding your *Hanguang-jun* really is!"

Both Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen frowned as both looked at their former disciple. How did they miss the tangible hatred for Lan Wangji in his eyes until now? Gusu Lan will need a thorough vetting when they return. Disciples like him should not be permitted to continue acting as they please.

"Move aside!" A couple Wen disciples moved to tie up Mianmian but are stopped by Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan. The two showed no inclination to move away, intending to protect the girl.

"What? Are you acting out hero saving the beauty?" Wen Chao sneered at the two sect heirs.

"Are you trying to rebel?" Wen Chao pointed at them in anger. "I'm barely tolerating you right now! You better personally string the girl up or else don't expect to return to your sects!"

Neither boy moved an inch nor responded.

"See? This is what a real man should be like!" Lan Jingyi crossed his arms and tilted his head up with a smirk. Laughing in his heart at Su She's darkened expression.

"Very true! Lan Er-gongzi and Jin-gongzi are true examples of ideal men. Even Wei Wuxian would have stepped up if he wasn't held back!"

"The second, third, and fourth ranked bachelors are truly deserving of their rankings!"

Liu Rushi smiled approvingly at her son as the other poured compliments towards the three boys. Whether consciously or not, they all chose to ignore both Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Cheng's dark expressions.

Su She, who had tried hard to make himself invisible until now, rushed over and grabbed Mianmian to tie her up. A blue streak of spiritual energy flung him violently against the cave wall.

The normally indifferent and placid Second Jade of Lan's quiet rage sent shivers down everyone's spine. The target of that rage, Su She, spit out a mouthful of blood and shivered in fear before lowering his head to hide the contempt in his eyes. *'The Wens are going to crush Gusu Lan now. Let's see how long you can remain arrogant, Lan Wangji!'*

"Shameless man!"

"Not only did he not help, he even gave into their demands to save himself!"

"Good thing they already expelled him from the Sect! I wouldn't be able to have faith in a disciple like that after this!"

"If he already schemed to have a guest disciple killed to save himself once, there's nothing stopping him from doing it again as we've seen!"

"Su Mingshan, I am disappointed with your future self's actions." Lan Qiren stroked his beard. "I hope you use this chance to better yourself."

"You are all judging me on actions I have never made!" Su She countered. "For all we know, these are lies made to sabotage us!"

Hua Cheng, "Whether or not you would take these actions, you know best in your heart. Lan-xiansheng has already said that he hopes you would learn from this and change your ways."

"They expelled me from Gusu Lan because of these so-called truths! When have I betrayed Gusu Lan?" Su She shot to his feet.

"Did you already forget why you were expelled? No one mentioned betrayal." Wei Wuxian laughed at the man's avoidance of the real reason he was expelled. "For intentionally harming a guest disciple. If anything, you would still be breaking the rules if you had succeeded. If I place a truth talisman on you, would you dare to swear you have no intention of harming a guest disciple."

Su She's face paled as all eyes converged on him. His face paled even further as he felt the cold glare of Lan Zhan. He had intentionally pulled Wei Wuxian down towards the Abyss to save himself. That would be the same as killing with his own hands in the eyes of the Lans. He felt the pressure increase as his mind blanked for a retort.

Relief soon came as the screen once again continued with the viewing.

Wen Chao, "KILL THEM!"

Although the Wen disciples quickly followed Wen Chao's order and attacked Jin Zixuan aggressively, they were hesitant in their attacks towards Lan Wangji as they lacked the skills to defeat him head on.

Dodging the incoming sword aimed at his head, Jin Zixuan quickly disarmed the Wen and took possession of his sword to cut down the next Wen that attacked.

Two of the more daring ones, knowing they're no match for Lan Wangji with swordplay, directly attacked with their flame torches. Lan Wangji quickly disarmed and knocked them out with their flame torch as more Wens joined the fray.

The younger boys' eyes flashed with excitement and their rapt attention glued to the screen. Hanguang-jun and Jin Ling's father was holding their own against spiritual swords while they

themselves were bare handed or using stolen swords.

Jin Ling, "So this is why you taught us to fight bare handed, Da-jiu!"

Wei Wuxian cleared his throat as Jiang Wanyin's eyes flashed with guilt. "That is part of the reason. As cultivators, we rely too heavily on our swords and spiritual power. It becomes a hindrance in dire situations. One must learn to use his bare hands sometimes in order to survive to live another day."

Xie Lian and Hua Cheng caught the guilty flash on Jiang Wanyin's face. Partnered with Wei Wuxian's words and actions since coming here, their suspicions are mounting and only one thought formed in their minds.

'Something is wrong with A-Ying's Golden Core.'

Wen Zhuliu did not move from his place beside Wen Chao but remained vigilant. He watched as the two boys began to tire out due to their injuries and lack of personal spiritual weapons to counterattack.

Seeing their sect heirs slowing down, the remaining Jins and Lans finally regained their senses and rushed to assist them. Some picked up what was available and fought back while others fought hand to hand with those who were disarmed by Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan. In the chaos, no one noticed the disturbance under the water surface.

Wei Wuxian made a move to help but was once again held back by Jiang Wanyin. He turned to Jiang Wanyin with a serious expression and said in a low voice, "This is not going to end well for any of us. Would we really not be implicated if we do nothing?"

"Why does Jiang Wanyin keep holding A-Ying back from helping others at a time like this? They're all going to be implicated no matter what." Shi Qingxuan asked as his fan tapped his chin.

Mu Qing, "Isn't it obvious? The way Jiang Wanyin focuses on "care about yourself before others", his way of thinking is learned from his mother. So should we thank her for not corrupting A-Ying or blame her for ruining her children?"

He Xuan, "Jiang Yanli isn't like her."

Mu Qing, "Ah, so it's just her son she's ruined."

Jiang Cheng bristled in anger and wanted to retort. However, his older self simply rolled his eyes and stopped him. "Only thing worth learning from her is how to combat and how to hold grudges. A-Die's not too much better. You're better off learning from Wei Wuxian."

"You!" Yu Ziyuan pointed her finger to Jiang Wanyin while gnashing her teeth. "Your wings have sprouted so you think you can speak about your mother in that way?!?!"

"If there was one thing that I've learned in all the years since Wei Wuxian's return, it's that you and I are resentful and selfish people. You believe everyone is at fault but never you. If they find fault, it's because they are judging and belittling you. Even now I have to fight against my instinct to lash out at people."

Although his heart was unsettled, Jiang Fengmian tried to urge his wife to sit back down. "San-niang, we have already offended the Immortal Beings more than we should. If you continue, Lotus Pier as well as Yunmeng Jiang will not make it out of this in one piece."

"This is the great son you taught!" Yu Ziyuan glared at Jiang Fengmian before returning to her seat with a huff.

Jin Zixuan, “It wasn’t enough for us to be meat shields for you so now you want to use us as live bait?!”

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin's eyebrows raised in surprise. “So he actually has some guts.”

Wen Chao, “You dare to talk back to me!?!? Who do you think you are? People like you deserve to be killed.”

“That’s right.” A mirthful voice cut through the noise, causing the fighting to stop abruptly. The cultivators all turned to look at the source of the voice in confusion.

Confusion descended upon those in the hall as well. What is this boy trying to do?

Jin Zixuan, “Wei Wuxian… you-”

“All those who rely on the power of their clan to oppress others and do evil should be killed.” Wei Wuxian stood with his left arm on Jiang Wanyin’s shoulder.

Wen Chao, “What did you say?!?!?!”

“Eh? Do you need me to repeat it? Sure!” Wei Wuxian feigned surprise, “All those who rely on the power of their clan to oppress others and do evil should be killed. Not only that, they should be beheaded for tens of thousands to revile so that those to come would beware. You heard it this time, right?”

Lan Qiren glared at Wei Ying out of the corner of his eyes. "Wei Wuxian! You constantly forget Gusu Lan's precepts although you were made to copy them over and over again yet you memorized the Wens' precepts at a glance?"

Both Wei Ying and Wei Wuxian sheepishly chuckled. They can't really tell their future uncle-in-law it was because they thought Gusu Lan's precepts were ridiculous, now could they?

Wen Zhuliu's face turned thoughtful as he glanced at Wei Wuxian before shaking his head at Wen Chao's next words.

"How dare you say such absurd, outrageous, and pretentious words!"

***'This gongzi…'* Wen Zhuliu sighed in his heart and subtly glanced at Wen Chao out of the corner of his eyes. Wen Qing turned her head to hide her laughter.**

"Does… does he not know his own sect's precepts?" Laughed several cultivators.

"How embarrassing!"

Lan Sizhui, "Wen-laoshi…"

Wen Qionglin, "Didn't I tell you to call me Wen-gege?"

Wei Wuxian cackled at Lan Sizhui's still lost and awkward expression after all these years. "A-Yuan, just call him Wen-qianbei. It keeps him feeling young!"

Lan Sizhui, "Er, Wen-qianbei… did we collect any of those books when we went back to Qishan?"

"All burnt." Lan Wangji offered no further explanations.

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes, "Your Hanguang-jun burned down the entire Indoctrination platform while looking for Wei Wuxian during the war.

Hah?!?!? The boys could only gape at the elder Lan. We bow down to you Hanguang-jun. No one hurts your wife and comes out unscathed. We get it.

"Pfft" The corner of Wei Wuxian's mouth twitched before he broke down in laughter, shocking everyone. Wei Wuxian clutched Jiang Wanyin's shoulder as he caught his breath, "Absurd? Outrageous? I'd say you're the one who's all of those! Wen Chao, do you know who said those words?"

Wen Chao's face darkened at the boy's mocking tone.

"I'm sure you don't know, do you? Let me tell you." Wei Wuxian continued without even waiting for Wen Chao's response. "This was said by the most, most, most famous cultivator of your sect. The one who founded Qishan Wen, Wen Mao. You dared say

that one of your ancestor's remarks are absurd and outrageous? Well said, very well said! Ahahahahaha…"

Wen Chao's complexion flipped between flushing red and pale white. His body shook with embarrassment and rage. Unable to speak, he angrily pointed Wei Wuxian's way with a shaking finger.

"Right, what was the punishment given to those who insult the famous cultivators of Qishan Wen again? Oh, I remember. It was execution, right?" Wei Wuxian smirked and straightened up from leaning on Jiang Wanyin's shoulder. "Very well, you can die now."

"Oh! That's the 'I'm going to fuck shit up' smirk!" Nie Huaisang sat up straight in his seat.

Wei Ying, "Did you really give a name to my smirk?"

Nie Huaisang, "Of course! How else would I know how to react to your moods? The 'I'm up to no good' smirk means I get to enjoy contraband later. Then the 'I'm going to tease Lan Wangji' smirk means I should stay back and out of Lan-xiong's anger range. My favorite is the'"Let me make a fool out of someone' smirk! Always a joy to watch those who seek their deaths mess with you!"

He was going to continue but movement on the screen caught everyone's attention.

Provoked, Wen Chao couldn't hold himself back any longer. He unsheathed his sword and lunged at Wei Wuxian. His reckless action took him out of Wen Zhuliu's protective range. By the time Wen Zhuliu realized Wei Wuxian's plan to separate Wen Chao from him, he couldn't adjust and it was too late.

With the smirk still on his face, Wei Wuxian countered Wen Chao's attack swiftly and precisely. Within seconds, Wei Wuxian subdued Wen Chao with his own sword in just one move.

Using a little bit of spiritual energy, Wei Wuxian dragged Wen Chao onto the islet in the middle of the pool as he dodged Wen Zhuliu's glowing hands. Wen Chao found his own sword pressed against his neck the moment they landed on the islet.

"So cool!" The young boys shouted in unison. That only took Wei Wuxian a few seconds to disarm Wen Chao! If he had his own sword, how much damage would he have been able to inflict?

Yao-zongzhu, "Is Wei Wuxian too masterful…?"

Ouyang-zongzhu, "Or is Wen Chao that… weak?"

Wei Wuxian, “Nobody moves. If you’re not careful, I just might decide to let some blood out of Wen Er-gongzi!”

Wen Chao paled before screeching out, “Stop moving! Stop moving!”

The Wen disciples surrounding the cultivators finally ceased their attacks. Wen Zhuliu made a quick decision and took a step forward to capture Jiang Wanyin.

Wei Wuxian had kept his gaze on Wen Zhuliu and noticed his movement, “Core-Melting Hand, you stop moving as well! You also know Wen-zongzhu's temper. Your er-gongzi is in my hand. If he loses just one drop of blood, then none of us here should hope to keep our lives, including you!”

Wen Zhuliu took a step back as Wei Wuxian had expected. Seeing that the situation was in their favor, Wei Wuxian was about to speak again when the ground beneath him shook. He instantly went on alert, “Jiang Cheng! Is it an earthquake?”

The shaking of the ground underneath his feet intensified, causing Wei Wuxian and Wen Chao to sway around. The blade pushed against Wen Chao’s throat a couple of times, making him scream.

"What's happening?"

"Did they really find a beast?"

"What if the cave collapsed?!?!"

“It’s not an earthquake! That thing under your feet is moving!!!” Jiang Wanyin shouted back.

Wei Wuxian noticed that those on the shore stood firmly on their feet. It was only then he felt the ground rising. The islet above the surface of the water grew taller and taller as the ground where the rest stood shrunk smaller and smaller. Wei Wuxian planted his feet firmly on the ground and remained alert for any attacks from a beast.

The mass continued to displace the water and red maple leaves as it splashed against the shore. Lan Wangji, Jin Zixuan, Jiang Wanyin, Wen Zhuliu, and Wen Qing stood their ground by the shore while the rest retreated back in fear. Nie Huaisang chose to hide quietly behind Jiang Wanyin's back as his eyes swept across the water.

Wei Wuxian leaned over and chanced a look into the water below. In the depths of the pool, what seemed like a pair of glowing bronze mirrors grew larger and larger as it neared the surface of the water.

"Beast!"

"They actually found a beast there!"

"I'll be seeing those eyes in my nightmares now!"

"Run! Stop standing by the water and run!"

With a curse under his breath, Wei Wuxian quickly stepped back and pulled Wen Chao closer to himself.

"Wei Wuxian! Release me!" Wen Chao screamed. Terror clearly written on his face. His terrified screams could barely be heard over the screams from the shore.

Behind them, a coal-black snake head popped out from behind the large mass. The head moved closer to the source of noise on its back and a pair of glowing golden eyes struggled to focus on Wei Wuxian and Wen Chao.

"What a large… tortoise…" Wei Wuxian dumbly noted before realizing that the beast not only had a snake head, it was nearly blind from living in the dark cave for so long. Those on the shore seemed to have come to the same conclusion and quieted down.

Ling Wen narrowed her eyes on the screen as she walked back to her seat. "There was once a report that a cultivator named Xue Chonghai dabbled with resentful energies and controlled a giant mutated beast that swallowed thousands in order to increase the resentment for his cultivation with an iron sword. After the leaders of the Great Sects brought him down, his beast had gone missing."

Wen Qing furrowed her brows as she listened to Ling Wen's story. "Wen Ruohan had a journal that he studied while cultivating resentful energies. That was how he came to know that there may be a beast hidden in Dusk-Creek Mountain. Maybe it was Xue Chonghai's journal?"

"X-Xue?"

"Xue… as in… Xue Yang?" Lan Jingyi hesitantly asked.

The terrified stutters from the young future cultivators drew everyone's attention to them. Their faces had drained of all color while they fought to keep their composure. From their reactions, the name Xue Yang couldn't possibly mean anything good.

Xiao Xingchen cleared his throat before looking at the young boys before him. "Xue Yang was an orphan when we met him. It's possible he may be related to Xue Chonghai somewhere along the line."

"Who exactly is this Xue Yang? What has he done that causes these boys to be so terrified at a mere mention of his surname?" Lan Qiren looked to Zewu-jun and Lan Wangji.

"A psychotic murderer." Song Lan tightened his jaw.

Xiao Xingchen, "At this time… he hasn't become that person yet, Zichen."

Song Lan, "There's no guarantee that he won't be either."

"We can always ask the Sect Leader of Yueyang Chang if he had cheated any street kids out of some candy recently." Wei Wuxian's grey eyes landed on the Chang Sect Leader, causing the man to break out in a cold sweat.

"I… what street kid? I- I haven't come into con-contact with any street children!" Chang Ci'an stuttered. He had just seen the street boy the other day and had yet to have the boy send the letter to his rival. How could this have anything to do with him?

Lan Qiren turned thoughtfully to the Chang Sect Leader. "How does a kid being cheated of candy lead to him being a psychotic murderer?"

"Chang-zongzhu sent the young Xue Yang on an errand to deliver a letter to the man he had a feud with. The letter enraged the man leading him to beat Xue Yang mercilessly." Wei Wuxian chuckled as Chang-zongzhu became even more pale. "When Xue Yang returned for the candy he was promised, Chang-zongzhu not only did not give him the promised candy… he even crushed the boy's pinky finger with his carriage."

The Head Shaker opened his fan to fan himself before adding, "He later massacred the entire Yueyang Chang Sect with the encouragement of Jin Guangshan and Jin Guangyao. 50 lives for one pinky as recompense, what do you think Chang-zongzhu?"

Gasps and mumbles erupted in the hall. Those sitting beside Chang Ci'an subtly put some space between him and themselves. Chang Ci'an was known to be cruel in his dealings with others but for him to come up with such a thing… they didn't want to be implicated.

The Head Shaker chuckled at their reactions. "That's just the tip of the iceberg of Xue Yang's deeds. These boys, unfortunately, had first hand experience dealing with Xue Yang so it's understandable that they would react as they did."

Silence fell upon the hall as they each digested what they just heard. Lan Xichen looked at Meng Yao as his mind tried to make sense of everything. What would be the right course of action? The actions of their future selves have given everyone something to think about. How should they continue on once they leave this space?

Wei Wuxian remained quiet and motionless even as the beast shot out two streams of water vapors from its large nostrils. But he was not quick enough to cover Wen Chao's mouth.

Deciding that the sword at his throat was less of a threat than the beast in front of him, Wen Chao flailed his arms and screamed at Wen Zhuliu, "Why aren't you helping me?!?! Help me now! What are you waiting for!?!?!"

On the shore, Jiang Wanyin and Wen Qing cursed out loud, "That idiot!"

"Idiot!"

"What an idiot!"

"If he can't even make basic observations, then let the beast eat him!" Nie Mingjue sneered at the screen.

"A-Xian!" Jiang Yanli gasped out as the beast struck at Wei Wuxian on the screen.

The beast's snake head instantly locked in on the source of the noise and snapped its black-stained yellow fangs towards the two on its back.

Wei Wuxian shoved Wen Chao to the side as he sent Wen Chao's sword at where he thought the beast's heart should be. Barely dodging the giant fangs.

The sword shot like an arrow accurately to its target, however, black scales covered the beast's neck and head like iron armor. The blade of the sword made a trail of sparks as it made contact with the beast before plummeting into the water.

The glare of the sword falling into the water distracted the beast long enough for Wei Wuxian to kick off the beast's back and onto a smaller boulder with Wen Chao in tow.
'Please… don't tell me that this one is a huge tortoise as well!'

Mu Qing, "The scales on the tortoise are tougher than steel armor."

"It's no wonder it's been able to survive for so long." Pei Ming agreed with his observation. In his mind, he was formulating how he would bring this beast down.

"Didn't A-Ying and Lan Wangji manage to kill it together?" Banyue spoke after a while.

Admiration shown in everyone's eyes as they turned to observe Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji. Only to immediately look away as Lan Wangji patiently fed a loquat to a smiling Wei Wuxian. Both men were oblivious to their surroundings as they smiled at each other.

The Immortal Beings looked away with a grimace. Being around Hua Cheng and Xie Lian seemed more bearable than being fed dog food by Lan Wangji and A-Ying. Hua Cheng's face, however, remained darkened.

“Watch your back! The Core-Melting Hand is coming!” Jiang Wanyin suddenly shouted. Wei Wuxian spun around and came face to face with the hand glowing with dark red energy that was heavily tinged with resentful energy. By reflex, Wei Wuxian struck out his injured right arm to block the attack.

Wei Wuxian's golden core flashed on the screen. Resentful energy overpowered his spiritual energy and drew it out from his golden core. Dark red energy quickly took its place to swirl around the golden core before forcing its way in.

The core's golden color darkened although it began to glow. Within seconds, more dark energy invaded Wei Wuxian's golden core and it began to heat up more and more.

Wei Wuxian's attention was finally pulled away from Lan Wangji as he absentmindedly pondered to himself, "Huh… so that's how it worked. Definitely less bloody."

Eyebrows twitched as they watched Wei Wuxian, whom they have determined to be a psychotic genius, break down and analyze the Core-Melting Hand's abilities. Was… was he going to try and replicate it?!?!?

Uncomfortable with the heat in his dantian, Wei Wuxian instinctively pulled away. Wen Zhuliu took the opportunity to snatch Wen Chao away and return to shore.

With a curse under his breath, Wei Wuxian also returned to shore as the Wen disciples sent a barrage of arrows at the beast. The metal arrowheads clinked against the beast’s scales, creating sparks before uselessly dropping into the water.

Irritated, the beast swung its head towards the closest source of light. It happened to be a Wen disciple holding a flame torch. In one breath, the Wen disciple was eaten whole. The sudden attack stunned those nearby and another Wen disciple loosened an arrow that hit barely missed the beast’s eye.

Nie Mingjue couldn't help but search for his brother in the crowd to be sure he wasn't in immediate danger.. He slammed his fist down on the arm of his chair. "They’re like sitting ducks without their weapons!"

Every cultivator watched with their hearts in their throats. These were their disciples and Sect Heirs who were being mauled and eaten! No one could remain calm while faced with this!

Bodies are slammed against stone as the large black head swipes at any movement or sound in its vicinity. Wei Wuxian analyzed the situation from where he stood. Noticing a

Wen disciple shakily notching an arrow. His terror induced shaking became uncontrollable and he could not even draw the bow correctly.

Suddenly, the three arrows were pulled from his back quiver and his bow snatched from his hands. Wei Wuxian notched all three arrows and drew the bowstring by his ear with an arrogant smirk on his face.

A terrified cry from behind caught his attention before he could release the arrows. Behind him, two Wen disciples grabbed hold of Mianmian under Wang Lingjiao's order. A third held a burning hot branding iron in his hand and pushed it towards her face.

Seeing that no one was close enough to help the girl, Wei Wuxian shifted the direction of the bow and loosened the arrows towards the three Wen disciples. Even before their bodies hit the ground, Wang Lingjiao snatched up the branding iron. Determined to disfigure the Jin disciple, Wang Lingjao grabber Mianmian's hair and shoved the branding iron towards her face once again.

"That venomous bitch!" Nie Mingjue cursed at the Wen maid. "At a time like that, she could still think of such petty actions!"

"A woman like her, even under such dangerous circumstances where people were prepared to flee at a moment's notice, still kept her persistent thoughts of harming others!"

"If she really did it, even if Mianmian could keep her eye, her face would be completely ruined!"

Apart from her chastity, a woman's face was her most precious commodity. Once ruined, she would be shunned and shamed for having such a thing happen to her. Each female cultivator felt the poor girl's panic as if it's their own.

Out of arrows and weapons, Wei Wuxian had no other choice but to rush over. In a series of movements, he struck Wang Lingjiao's hand away from Mianmian's hair while his other hand struck her forcefully in the chest.

Wei Wuxian did not temper his strike therefore causing Wang Lingjiao to spit out a mouthful of blood and slammed backwards onto the ground.

"Good hit!"

"Serves her right!"

Nie Mingjue nodded his head in approval, "Women like her deserve no less! You did well, Wuxian!"

Cheers rang out one by one at Wang Lingjiao's state until what they saw next made the hall drop into shocked silence.

The same time his strike landed, the burning tip of the branding iron pressed into Wei Wuxian's chest.

The smell of burning clothes and scorched flesh reached his nose before scorching pain bloomed on his chest. He gritted his teeth to not make a noise as his face turned red. Seconds later he succumbed to the overwhelming pain and a scream ripped out from his throat.

The hall continued to remain silent. Wei Wuxian had protected the female Jin disciple. He could have ignored the scene and continued to attack the beast with their limited supply of weapons and arrows. But he chose to help and even got hurt because of it. It seemed to be a running occurrence for Wei Wuxian. He saves someone and he ends up getting hurt in the process without fail. And yet he continues to help everyone.

Zewu-jun raised an eyebrow at his younger brother. The position of Wei Wuxian's brand looks awfully familiar. *'Ah… this explains so much.'*

Feng Xin, "So that's where the brand came from?"

Hua Cheng glared at the screen before him. "Should I drag her ghost back to Ghost City?"

"I'm sure the ghosts there would love to find out how A-Ying got that brand on his chest." Xie Lian agreed with his husband.

"His ghost spirit…when it was a child… it carried the brand as well?" Jiang Yanli could help but ask. How distressing would it have been for a child to not know why his body carried such scars.

Xie Lian, "Every scar on his body was there from his first manifestation. It was… quite a shock to us all the first time he took a shower in the rain."

Shi Qingxuan, "And now we'll know the story behind some of those scars it seems."

Both Hua Cheng and Xie Lian eyed Wei Wuxian. There was one scar they were more curious about now after everything they've seen and heard. The one down his chest.

His scream made Lan Wangji's heart stop before he rushed towards Wei Wuxian but was blocked by several Wens. Wen Qing subconsciously took a step towards Wei Wuxian causing Wen Zhuliu to look her way.

Jiang Wanyin reached for Wang Lingjiao's head when she hit the ground. Her cries caught Wen Chao's attention, where he hid behind Wen Zhuliu. "Jiaojiao! Jiaojiao! Quick, bring Jiaojiao back over here!"

With a frown, Wen Zhuliu fended off Jiang Wanyin and tossed the bawling Wang Lingjiao at Wen Chao. Jiang Wanyin continued to chase after and struggled to attack Wen Zhuliu with a terrifying expression. ' *Wei Wuxian and hold his own against him, why can't I?'*

Behind them, the beast took one step onto the shore. Its stomp shook the ground and all fighting ceased as they all looked to the water.

"It's… it's huge!" Ouyang Zizhen gasped.

"There's more of it hidden in the water!!"

"How would you even know where to attack it?!?!"

"It's all bouncing back!"

"RETREAT! RETREAT! RIGHT NOW!!!" Wen Chao's terrified screaming echoed through the cave.

Wen Chao snatched Wen Qing's sword and hopped on to escape with Wang Lingjiao. Wen Zhuliu stepped on his sword and pulled Wen Qing up to stand in front of him. In the blink of an eye, all the Wens mounted their swords and flew out of the cave. Cutting down the vines everyone used to climb down.

"Stop fighting the beast! Let's go!" Jin Zixuan shouted as he ran towards the vines they had climbed down. Realizing retreat was their best chance at surviving, the others followed after him.

Swords slashed through thick vines at the top of the slope. Wen Chao scoffed before leading the Wens out of the cave.

"Oh my God! They're going to stand them down there!!"

"Without their swords, how are they going to escape now?"

"These bastards really dared to!"

"Look! Oh my God! They're going to block the cave entrance!"

"Hurry! Blow up the entrance!" Wen Chao ordered his disciples to collapse the entrance.

Wen Zhuliu continued to drag Wen Qing away as she fought to run back towards the cave. "No! Stop! They will die!"

Wen Chao sneered at the cave entrance being sealed up by falling boulders. "It's fine if they die."

Wen Qing, "Wen Chao! How will your father face the main clans if you do this?!?!"

"Don't try to intimidate me with my father. Don't forget, your entire Dafan branch is still in our hands." Wen Chao looked at Wen Qing with disgust. "The other sects are just trash. They are going to be wiped out by us sooner or later."

Wen Chao, "Besides, we can just make up an excuse. Yunmeng Jiang started the rebellion, and other sects backed them up. Then we will have an excuse to burn down Lotus Pier!"

Wen Qing could only stare at him, flabbergasted by his words. The helplessness of the situation forced her to take a deep breath. Her resistance to Wen Chao today will cost her later. *'Wei Wuxian is there… he'll find a way. A-Ning believes in him.'*

Wen Chao began to get impatient and barked out one last order before leaving with Wang Lingjiao who was smirking in his arms. "Bring more men to surround Dusk-Creek Mountain. If someone escapes, kill them at no cost! Leave no survivors!"

"Yes, Wen Er-gongzi!"

"Bastards!" Nie Mingjue slammed the arms of his chair. "They actually dared to strand the heirs and disciples of the sects with a man-eating beast!!!"

"Despicable! They can't win so they decide to take the crooked path."

Nie Huaisang, "I knew it! It wasn't Wei-xiong who caused Lotus Pier's destruction!"

One by one, everyone's gaze once again drifted to Yu Ziyuan. What excuse will she be using now?

Chapter End Notes

I love you guys!

Thank you so much for looking out for me! As of this moment, I have not given permission to anyone to use my work directly whether in their own fanfictions or as a

translated version.

As always, updates are sporadic but the story will continue! When life allows, I will continue to write!

"A married daughter is like spilled water." - Once a daughter is married off, they are no longer considered a member of their family and no longer has a say. A popular phrase used by those who take old fashion views to a new level which is wrong on so many levels.

"To take antiques for junk and sell them." - Unable to tell what is good or bad and make the wrong decisions.

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